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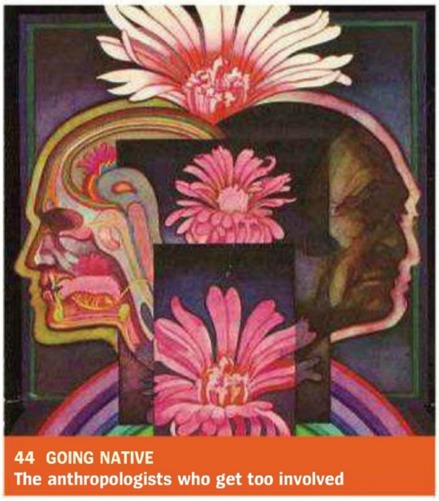

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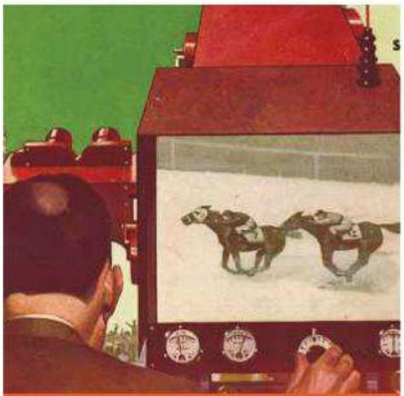

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editorial

Far-flung adventures

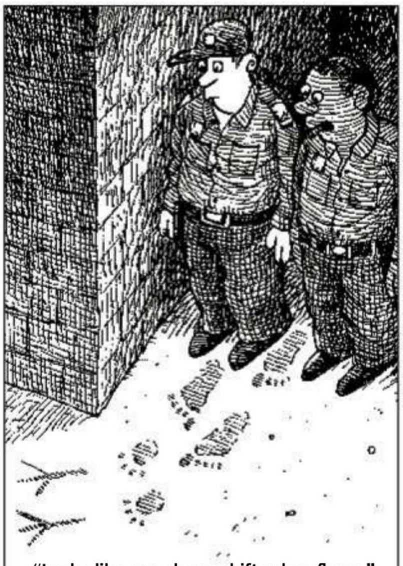
As we at Fortean Towers, and others across the UK, sit shivering in the unseasonable wet and gloom, we've tried to brighten things up by bringing you an issue with a strong flavour of adventure in far-flung places.

Our cover story finds film director and *FT* stalwart Richard Stanley going back to South Africa, the country of his childhood – supposedly to attend a film festival in his honour – only to find himself on the trail of the 'Steytlerville Monster' (**FT277:10**; **286:53**), a shape-shifting creature straight out of the region's folklore seemingly come to terrifying life. But were the events in Steytlerville an outbreak of genuinely supernatural phenomena, or was it some kind of archetypal expression of the political and social tensions that still grip the country?

Dr Ed Dutton, meanwhile, examines the way a number of his fellow social anthropologists have found themselves opening up to the supernatural beliefs of their subjects during long periods of fieldwork in remote regions of Zambia, Sudan or South America. Why, he asks, would highly qualified individuals find themselves accepting the reality of paranormal phenomena such as witchcraft rather than submitting them to the kind of scientific examination that they would employ 'back home' in the academy? Is there something about anthropological interaction with remote cultures that might foster increased belief in the supernatural?

And 75 years after her final flight ended in a disappearance that has fuelled speculation ever since, legendary aviatrix Amelia Earhart is back in the news. TIGHAR (The International Group for Historic Aircraft Recovery) has mounted various investigations and recovery expeditions around the world, and the group is about to embark on its latest project, Niku 7, a return to the remote Pacific island of Nikumaroro, in the Republic of Kiribati, in search of evidence that this was the final resting place of Earhart and her navigator Fred Noonan. Duncan Turner looks at some of the many theories that have been mooted over the years as to Earhart and Noonan's fate, and in an exclusive interview with TIGHAR's executive director Ric Gillespie, asks whether we are at last getting close to discovering the truth behind this long-running mystery.

And to round things off, our own errant ex-web mistress Jen Ogilvie files the first of her 'Letters from Cambodia', a series of dispatches in which she will be reporting on whatever weirdness she encounters. As she wrote to us: "Travelling around Cambodia, I'm struck all the time by the jostling traditions: the proud mythology of ancient Angkor, the pervasive Buddhism, the undercurrent of animism, and the abiding dark mystery of the Khmer Rouge... There's lots here for the curious fortean, and even collectors of obscure oddities may never have heard of the *devaraja* cult, or come across machete-wielding, ghost-busting scarecrows." We're sure that, like us, you'll look forward to hearing more about Jen's travels.


"Looks like our shape-shifter has flown."

MARTIN ROSS

A stolen life

FT286:50: We apologise to Robert Guffey, author of 'Cryptoscatology' (pp48–50). As he wrote to us to point out, something appears to have gone seriously awry with his author biography, which stated that he "is a freelance writer who attended a University of Oklahoma writing programme. He currently resides in the southwest USA and is married with two kids and a menagerie."

"I actually don't live anywhere near the American Southwest," said Robert, "don't have two kids, and don't own a menagerie (though, of course, there would be nothing wrong if I did!)." It turns out that the mystery menagerie owner is in fact Kym Chaffin, who wrote about Johnny Cash a few years back (**FT233:54–55**). Robert's author biog should have read: "Robert Guffey is a lecturer in the English Department at California State University – Long Beach. He has published numerous short stories and articles. His new book is *Cryptoscatology: Conspiracy Theory as Art Form*. His website is www.cryptoscatology.com."

DAVID SUTTON

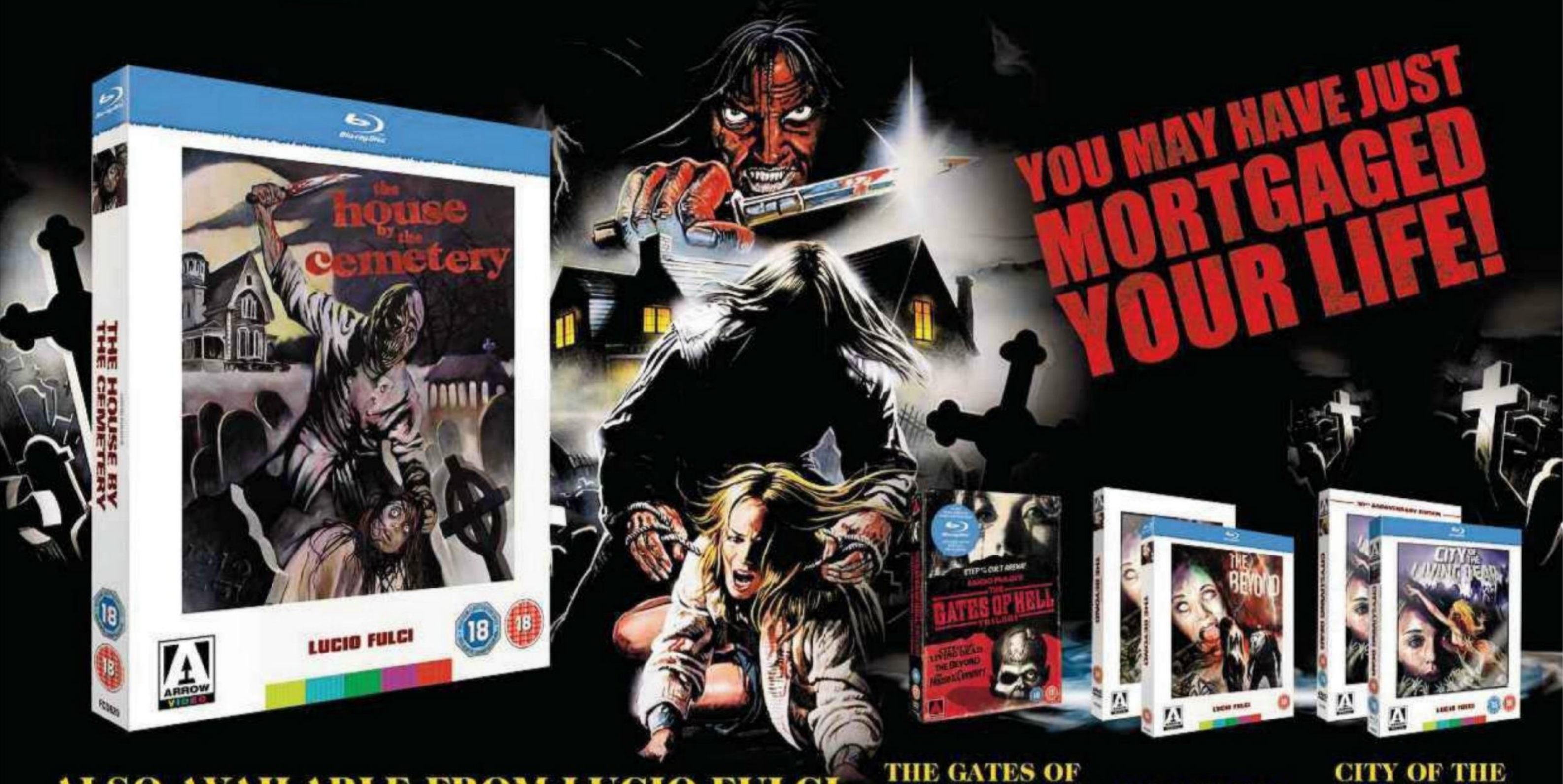
Paul Sieveking

BOB RICKARD PAUL SIEVEKING

Why fortean?
Everything you always wanted to know about *Fortean Times* but were too paranoid to ask!
SEE PAGE 78

LUCIO FULCI'S HEART STOMPING CLASSIC

the house by the cemetery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Haunted by the tsunami

After last year's disaster in Japan, many survivors are reporting ghosts and possession by spirits

The 9.0-magnitude earthquake and tsunami that struck Japan on 11 March 2011 killed nearly 16,000 people while another 3,200 have never been found. The wave was as high as 125ft (38m) in some places. At least 130,000 homes and buildings were destroyed, and 920,000 damaged, leaving 244,000 homeless. The water also washed away three things at the heart of spiritual belief: graveyards, temples and *ihai*, the memorial tablets inscribed with the names of ancestors. Because so many people died so suddenly, many families had to bury their loved ones without the traditional Buddhist ceremonies – if they had any remains to bury at all. Not surprisingly, many of the survivors in the afflicted area have reported the presence of ghosts and spirits. They range from people plagued by nightmares of friends and loved ones they could not save, through office workers who report an unnatural chill around a dead colleague's desk, to those whose minds seem to have been possessed.

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จากชายหาดและขึ้นที่สูงโดยเร็ว

"People see eyes in the darkness at midnight"

A fortnight after the disaster, Takeshi Ono (not his real name) went down to the tsunami zone to look at the ruined towns and piles of rubble by the sea. "After I returned home, I had dinner with my family," he recalled. "I had a couple of cans of beer and then I collapsed. After that I can't remember anything." His wife said he began licking his blankets and shouting: "Everyone must die! Everything must perish!" He ran outside and rolled in the earth. Next morning, the 36-year-old building contractor began to see people no one else could see: old men and women, hand in hand with small children, covered in wet mud.

After two nights of this, his family took him to the local Buddhist priest. "His eyes were lifeless, his expression was glassy," said the Rev Taio Kaneda. "When I looked at him I could tell at once that he was possessed, so I performed an exorcism." He seized Mr Ono by the collar and dragged him into his temple. "I had an urge to resist – I felt hostile towards him," said Mr Ono. "But when the priest read the sutras, I felt relief. There were tears in my eyes and mucus was running from my nose." The Rev. Kaneda chanted and splashed him with holy water and eventually whatever was possessing Mr Ono left him in peace.

"People see eyes in the darkness at midnight," said Rev. Naoya Kawakami, a Christian clergyman who works with the Rev. Kaneda in helping victims of the disaster. "A feeling that something is standing by a pillar, or that something invisible is waiting outside. Hearing voices. So many people are seeing ghosts these days and it's because of trauma. People talk of seeing ghosts on the beach, but what they're talking about is troubles back home." *Times, 10 Mar 2012. For apparitions following the Indian Ocean tsunami of Boxing Day 2004, see* **FT194:4–5**.

● Up to 20 million tons of debris floating from Japan following the tsunami could arrive on Hawaii's shores by early 2013 – earlier than expected – before fetching up on the coasts of Oregon, Washington, British Columbia and Alaska in 2014. Last October, a Russian training ship spotted the debris between Japan and the Midway Islands, covering an area roughly 2,000 miles (3,200km) long and 1,000 miles (1,600km) wide. The gigantic mass of trash includes cars, fridges and television sets. The Russians also spotted a 20ft (6m) fishing boat. Scientists were eager to track where the debris was heading because it could threaten small ships as well as coastlines. *MX News (Sydney), 25 Oct; (Sydney) D.Telegraph, 27 Oct 2011.*

● A football belonging to Misaki Murakami, 16, inscribed with his name, was one of the first pieces of debris to wash up in America. Radar technician David Baxter found it in April this year on Middleton Island, 70 miles (113km) from the Alaskan mainland. His Japanese wife Yumi translated the inscription on the ball – which included a school name and a "good luck" message – and traced Misaki with the help of a Japanese reporter. The ball was posted back to the teenager. "I lost everything in the tsunami, so I am delighted," said Misaki, who lives in Rikuzen-takata. On the fateful day, he was sick at home, but fled to higher ground when the quake struck. His home was then swept away. He had been given the ball by classmates in 2005 when he moved schools.

Mr Baxter, of Kasilof, Alaska, also found a Japanese girl's volleyball with her name on. After hearing the news, owner Shiori Sato, 19, from Iwate prefecture, declared: "It's a miracle". The shrimping boat *Ryou-Un Maru*, which was traced to the Japanese island of Hokkaido, also drifted to Alaska. The US Coast Guard used cannon to sink the crewless ship, which was first spotted off the coast of British Columbia on 23 March. *BBC News, 23 April; Sun, 24 April 2012.*

DOG-GUN-CRAZY

Pets shoot owners and bear saves man from puma

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HAVEN'T GONE YET

More people declared dead disagree on the diagnosis

PAGE 10

WATER MONSTERS

Nessie sonar claim, plus a legendary Icelandic worm

PAGE 24

"Sperm hunters" acquitted

Over thirty used condoms could not be linked to the accusers

Since 2009 (and possibly earlier), rumours have flown around Zimbabwe of male hitchhikers being kidnapped by prostitutes, drugged, forced to have sex at gun- or knife-point, and dumped by the roadside while their semen is retained for purposes of witchcraft. The semen's precise use was unclear but was thought to be intended for *juju*, or traditional rituals to bring good fortune, boost business or prevent a criminal being detected.

Incidents were reported from Harare, Gweru, and Mashonaland West. On 9 October 2011, police arrested three women after finding 33 (or 31) used condoms in a car. Rosemary Chakwizira (24), Sophie Nhokwara (26) and her sister, Netsai Nhokwara (24), all from Mkoba, came under suspicion after asking officers if they could retrieve a bag of condoms from their car, which had just been involved in an accident in Lower Gweru. The women, and their male driver Thulani Ngwenya (24), were held on suspicion of multiple counts of indecent assault. One Gweru resident said the three women were known in the town and regularly attended nightclubs there.

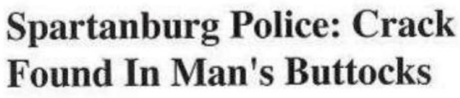
The accused appeared before a magistrate in Harare on 14 October. They denied the charges, with the women claiming to be "ordinary hard-working prostitutes". The prosecution named 17 supposed victims. It was alleged that on 3 March the accused picked up a 19-year-old man in Bubiriro, Harare, as he was on his way into town. They sprayed him with a chemical that made him feel dizzy before driving him to an area of bush, where he was forced to drink a sexual stimulant and copulate with all three women using condoms. Other alleged victims included a soldier in civvies, picked up in Norton on 22 August, and a policeman, also not in uniform, picked up in Chinhoyi on 14 September.

Watch Ruparanganda, a sociologist at the University of Zimbabwe, believes sperm harvesting is a lucrative business. Seven years ago, he was astonished to find that semen had become a tradable commodity, a fact he discovered during research for his doctoral thesis among Harare street youth. They told him that businessmen would take them to hotels, give them new clothes and ply them with alcohol. They were then ordered to pick a prostitute and to hand over the used condom after sex.

Back in 2002, a 33-year-old man in Kraaifontein, South Africa, was accosted by a stranger who lured him to his house with an offer of food. Once there, he was locked in and forced to ejaculate into a jar before being allowed to leave. [**FT167:10**] A 2011 report from South Africa claimed a condom full of semen could fetch as much as £250.

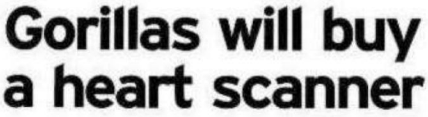
On 3 May, the three women arrested last October were released after DNA evidence failed to show a link with the 17 men who contended they had been abused. However, they still face prostitution charges. *dailymail.co.uk, 13+17 Oct; [DPA] 16 Oct 2011; [AFP] 22 Mar; [AP] Sydney Morning Herald, 4 May 2012.*

EXTRA! EXTRA! FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD



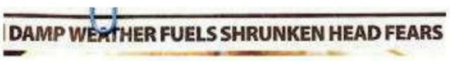
Spartanburg Police: Crack Found In Man's Buttocks

WSPA (News Channel 7) (Spartanburg, SC), 15 Mar 2011.



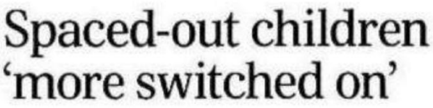
Gorillas will buy a heart scanner

Bristol Eve. Post, 29 Sept 2011.



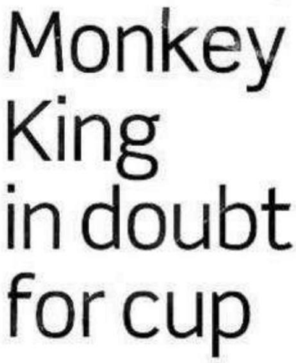
DAMP WEATHER FUELS SHRUNKEN HEAD FEARS

Morning Star, 10 Oct 2011.



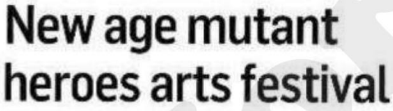
Spaced-out children 'more switched on'

D.Telegraph, 28 Nov 2011.



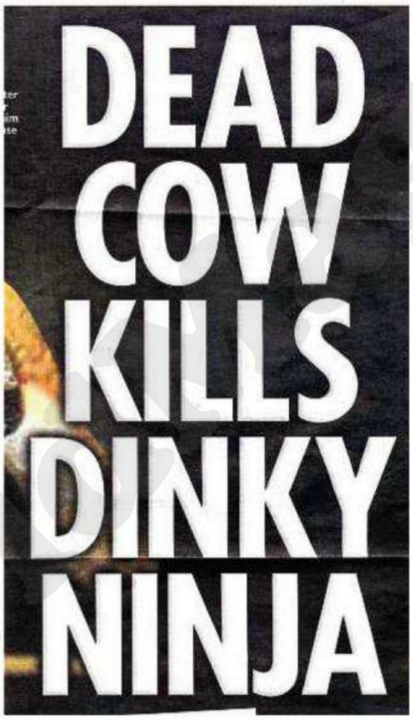
Monkey King in doubt for cup

The Press (Christchurch, NZ), 28 Oct 2011.



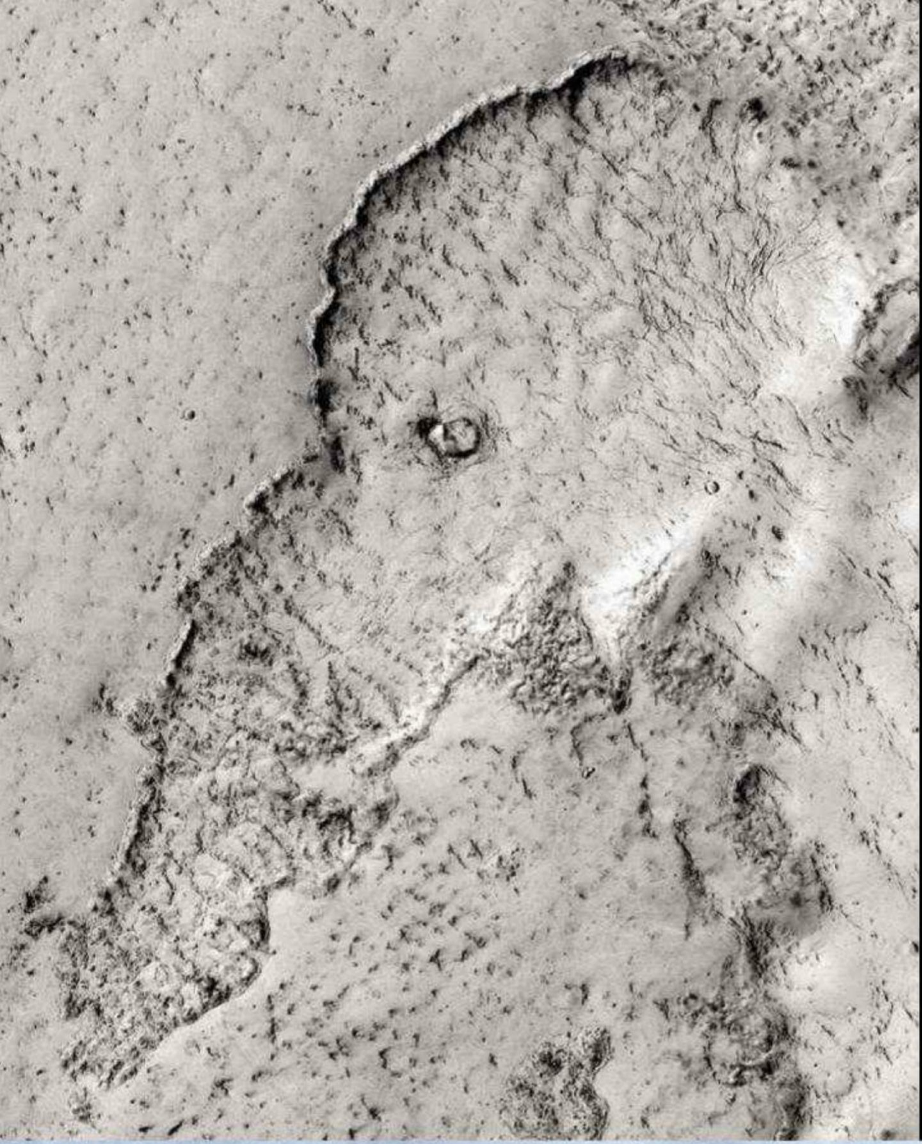
New age mutant heroes arts festival

Irish Times, 22 Nov 2011.



DEAD COW KILLS DINKY NINJA

Sun, 19 Nov 2011.



ELEPHANT ON MARS

This Mars Reconnaissance Orbiter image shows a lava flow that took place around 100 million years ago in Elysium Planitia, the second largest volcanic region on Mars. Why it is a simulacrum of an elephant's head is a question for the Cosmic Joker. The volcanoes on Mars are the largest in the Solar System. *Metro, Sun, 11 April 2012*.

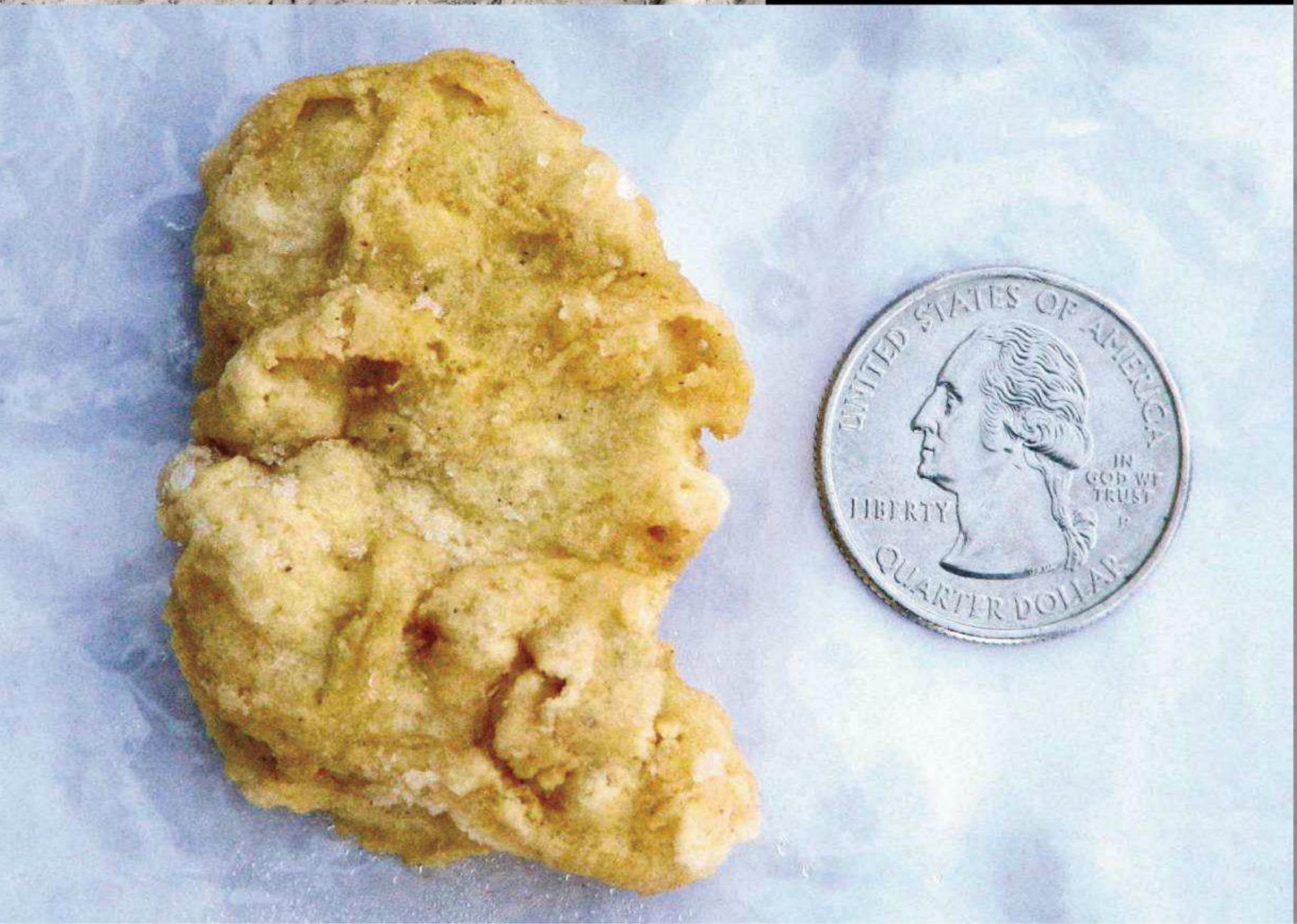
PHOTO: NASA

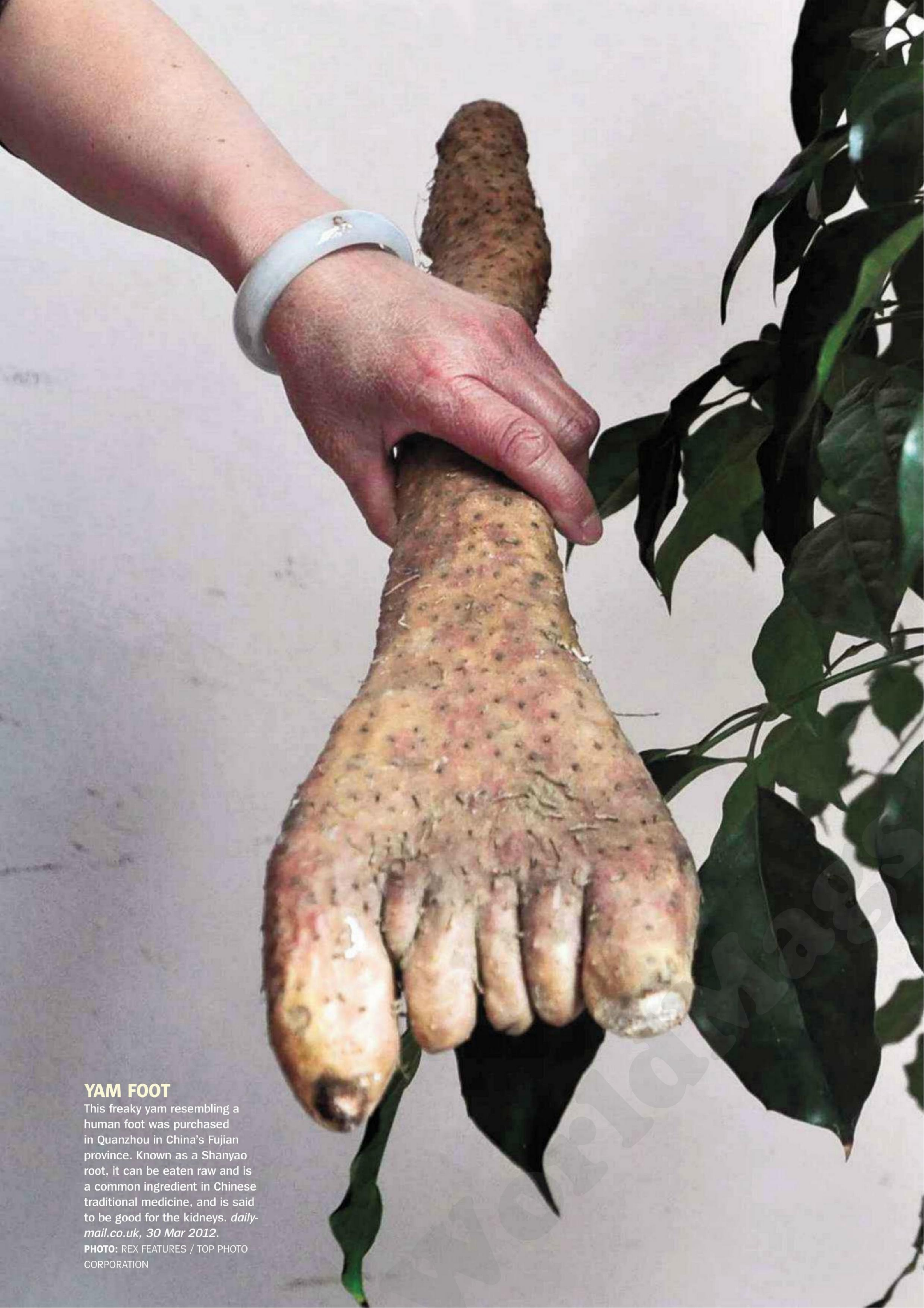
McMIRACLE

On 5 March, a Chicken McNugget fetched $8,100 (£5,145) on eBay – because the deep-fried snack resembles President George Washington. It was acquired for 99 cents by Rebekah Speight's children at their local McDonald's in Dakota City, Nebraska, in 2009. Mrs Speight kept it in her freezer before putting it on eBay. The auction site received 44,795 views, while 1,610 people were actively watching the listing. The unnamed buyer beat 70 others to acquire the bite-sized piece of history. The money raised will help send 50 children to summer church camp in Sioux City.

Other daft prices paid for oddly-shaped food include: $28,000 (£18,000) in 2004 for a 10-year-old cheese sandwich said to bear the image of the Virgin Mary [**FT192:4**]; $1,350 (£860) in 2008 for a cornflake in the shape of the state of Illinois; and $76 (£48) for a baked potato sliced open to reveal the shape of a cross. The "Nun Bun", a cinnamon bun resembling the face of Mother Teresa [**FT97:8**], went on display in 1996 when it was found in the Bongo Java coffee shop in Nashville, Tennessee. T-shirts, bookmarks, prayer cards and coffee mugs were marketed, bearing an image of the sacred pastry, which was then stolen in 2005. *Metro, <i>, 7 Mar 2012*.

PHOTO: AP / PRESS ASSOCIATION IMAGES / NATE ROBSON





YAM FOOT

This freaky yam resembling a human foot was purchased in Quanzhou in China's Fujian province. Known as a Shanyao root, it can be eaten raw and is a common ingredient in Chinese traditional medicine, and is said to be good for the kidneys. *dailymail.co.uk, 30 Mar 2012*.

PHOTO: REX FEATURES / TOP PHOTO CORPORATION

WorldMags

SIDELINES...

HOME SWEET HOME

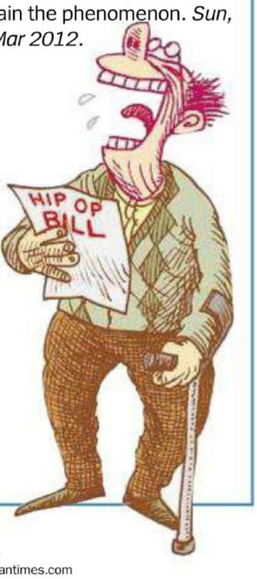
When Ann Murray returned to her apartment in South Bend, Indiana, at about 11.30pm on 6 February, she found a strange man in her sitting room. She thought she was being robbed, but actually, as she told police, Keith Davis, 45, "had cooked some chicken and onions in a pot, folded my clothes and swept my floor." He had entered the apartment through an unlocked front window. Police thought he "was on some type of drug" and that he genuinely believed he lived there. *WSBT-TV (USA), 9 Feb 2012.*

IT GOT HIS GOAT

When he couldn't find his house keys, Mathew Batt, 26, started screaming and smashing windows at his home in New Zealand. He then went to his mother's house where he tried to strangle the family goat and then attacked his sister, until his grandmother sprayed him with oven cleaner. He was given four months' detention. *MX News (Sydney), 16 Mar 2012.*

IN STITCHES

Since coming round from hip replacement surgery in 2010, Dutch farmer Huug Bosse, 70, has been laughing virtually non-stop, driving his family crazy. "Laughing is the only thing he does," said his wife Nolda. "You can hardly talk to him. It's so bad my daughter and his brother don't want to visit us." Doctors can't explain the phenomenon. *Sun, 20 Mar 2012.*



MARTIN ROSS

Animals fight back...

Mama bear rescues hiker from puma, canine gun play

BEAR VS PUMA

MATT CRUICKSHANK

Robert Biggs, 69, from Paradise, California, a woodsman for more than five decades, was hiking along the Feather River in the Bean Soup Flat area, north of Sacramento, on 26 March when he came across a mother bear, a yearling and a newborn, about 40ft (12m) away. After watching them for a few minutes, he turned to walk back up the trail, but just then a mountain lion pounced on him, grabbing hold of his backpack.

"They usually grab hold of your head with all four paws," he said, "but my backpack was up above my head and [the lion] grabbed it instead. It must have been stalking the little bear, but it was on me in seconds." He wrestled with the cat, striking it in the head with a rock pick; it yelped in pain but stood its ground. "I thought I was finished," he said. Before he knew it, the mother bear came from behind and pounced on the cat, tearing its grip from the backpack. "It grabbed the lion's throat and started shaking it." The animals battled for about 15 seconds until the cat finally ran away. "After the fight, I just stood rooted to the spot," he said. "I was terrified. But the bear just kind of calmly walked back to its cubs on all fours again and shepherded them towards the river. I couldn't believe my life had been saved by a backpack and a bear. But I guess she was following her instinct to protect her cubs." Biggs ended up with bite marks, scratches and bruises to his arm, but was otherwise uninjured.

Biggs had hiked that same trail several times and had seen the mother bear and its cub last spring and fall. The encounters had been friendly, and he was certain that the bear that had saved him was the same one he had seen in that area before. "They're pretty territorial," he said, adding that he recognised some of the bear's markings. Though his arm was pretty cut up, he chose not to go to the doctor, a move that concerned his wife Suzanne. "There were puncture wounds and skin was hanging off, and you don't know what's in their paws," she said. Biggs wasn't worried as he had a tetanus jab a couple of years ago and simply put peroxide on his wounds. *Paradise (CA) Post, 27 Mar; D.Star on Sunday, 1 April 2012.*

The mother bear came from behind and pounced on the cat

DOGS SHOOT MEN

- Matthew Marcum, 23, was about to go duck-hunting in Portand, Oregon, when his three-year-old Labrador, Drake, jumped into his boat, landed on his 12-gauge shotgun, and shot him in the legs and buttocks. Recovering in hospital after treatment, Marcum said he bore no grudge against Drake, who he described as "a good dog". *MX News (Brisbane), 26 Nov; The News (Portsmouth), 29 Nov 2008.*

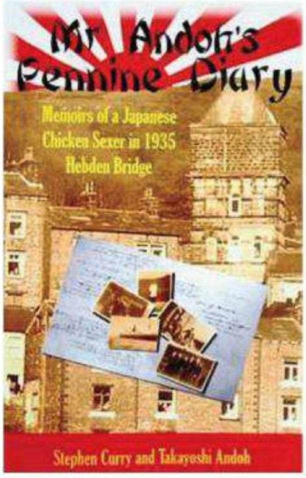
- A 40-year-old man from Te Kopuru in northern New Zealand was stable in Whangarei Hospital after his dog shot him in the left buttock. He was on a pig hunt with three other men, getting onto the back seat of their four-wheel drive vehicle, when his dog jumped in and landed on a .22 bolt-action rifle, setting off the trigger. The hunters told police they thought the gun was unloaded, but it had contained five shells. *telegraph.co.uk, 13 July; D.Mail, 14 July 2010.*

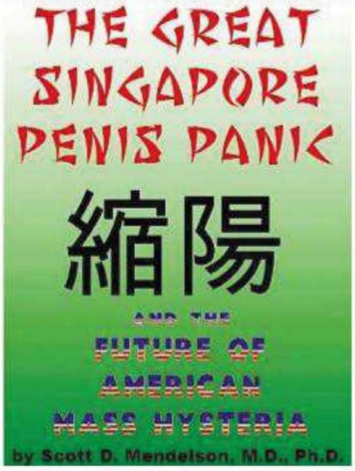
- An unnamed American was shot in the buttocks when his dog stepped on a shotgun during a hunting trip. Sheriff's deputy Kevin Potter said the 46-year-old man from Brigham City, Utah, was duck-hunting with a friend in a boat on Great Salt Lake when he climbed out of the vessel to move decoys. He had left his 12-gauge shotgun lying across the bow and the dog stepped on it, causing it to fire. It wasn't clear whether the gun's safety catch was on at the time. The man was hit from about 10ft (3m) away with 27 pellets of birdshot. He wasn't seriously injured, in part because he was wearing waders. *NY Post, 1 Dec; Irish Times, 3 Dec; [AP] 6 Dec 2011.*

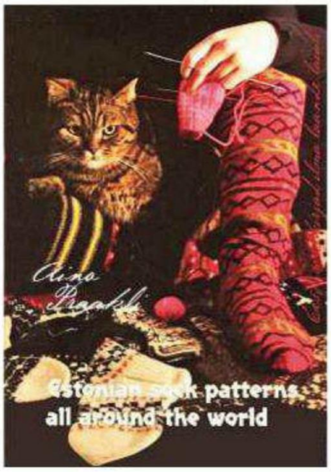
- Florida deer hunter Billy Brown, 78, was driving when his bulldog, Eli, managed to discharge a rifle sitting between them into his right thigh. He was rushed to hospital in Tampa where he underwent surgery and his condition was described as 'stable'. *MX News (Sydney), 14 Dec 2011.*

The year's oddest title

Another round-up of intriguing and amusing publications


Mr Andoh's Pennine Diary
Memoirs of a Japanese Chicken Sexer in 1935 Hebden Bridge
Stephen Curry and Takayoshi Andoh

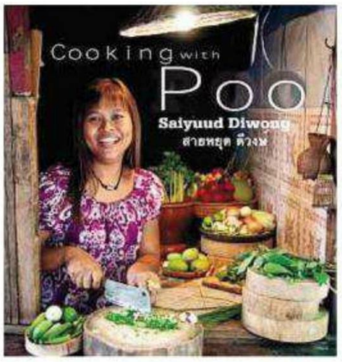

THE GREAT SINGAPORE PENIS PANIC
縮陽
AND THE FUTURE OF AMERICAN MASS HYSTERIA
by Scott D. Mendelson, M.D., Ph.D.



The Diagram Prize for Oddest Book Title of the Year, organised by *The Bookseller* magazine, shortlisted seven titles published in 2011. The winner was *Cooking with Poo*, a 114-page Thai cookbook by Saiyuud Diwong and published in Australia by Urban Neighbours of Hope. Diwong's nickname is "Poo" (Thai for "crab"). She is a resident of Klong Toey, the largest slum in Bangkok, where she runs the Helping Hands Thai Cookery School. The title polled 38 per cent of the 1,363 online votes cast.

The second most popular work was *Mr Andoh's Pennine Diary: Memoirs of a Japanese Chicken Sexer in 1935 Hebden Bridge* by Stephen Curry and Takayoshi Andoh. It tells the story of Koichi Andoh, who travelled from Japan to Yorkshire in the 1930s to train workers at a hatchery business the highly skilled (and highly paid) art of determining the sex of one-day-old chicks.

Next up is perhaps the most interesting book from a fortean point of view – and the only one also available in digital format. This is *The Great Singapore Penis Panic and the Future of American Mass Hysteria* by Scott D Mendelson, an analysis of the notorious Koro epidemic that hit Singapore in 1967. (For SE Asian koro, see "Shrinking Dicks" by Ian Simmons, **FT82:30**. See also **FT87:45, 93:10, 99:12, 103:12, 105:20, 148:23, 156:10, 211:16.**)



Two of the runners-up – *Estonian Sock Patterns All Around the World* by Aino Praakli and *A Taxonomy of Office Chairs* by Jonathan Olivares – are among the many arcane field guides to be short-listed over the years, such as *Collectable Spoons of the Third Reich*; *The Stray Shopping Carts of Eastern North America: A Guide to Field Identification*; and *The Changing World of Inflammatory Bowel Disease*. One of *FT*'s favourites was the 1996 winner, *Greek Rural Postmen and Their Cancellation Numbers*. Manuals have also been popular. Previous nods have gone to *Knitting With Dog Hair*; *Fancy Coffins To Make Yourself*; *Reusing Old Graves*; *How To Avoid Huge Ships*; and *Italian Without Words*.

The other 2011 titles shortlisted were: *The Mushroom in Christian Art* by John A Rush, in which the author maintains (*à la* John Allegro) that Jesus is a personification of the Holy Mushroom, *Amanita muscaria*; and *A Century of Sand Dredging in the Bristol Channel* (volume two) by Peter Gosson, a book that documents the sand trade from its inception in 1912 to the present day, focusing on the Welsh coast.

The Diagram Prize, conceived as a pastime for bored merchants at the annual Frankfurt Book Fair, was first awarded in 1978 to *Proceedings of the Second International Workshop on Nude Mice*. It was the idea of Bruce Robertson, the founder of publishing firm The Diagram Group – hence the name of the award. Horace Bent, the custodian of the prize, says "unintentional oddness is what we're after", so intentionally funny titles are disqualified. That's why he disapproved of the 2007 winner, *If You Want Closure In Your Relationship, Start With Your Legs*, preferring a runner-up, *Cheese Problems Solved*. He also rules out vanity publications: "It would be too easy to bash out a quick book with a title like *The Jellyfish Of Redcar's Car-Parks*." *National Post (Toronto), 26 Feb; www.thebookseller.com, 2 April 2012.*

SIDELINES...

A COLD CASE

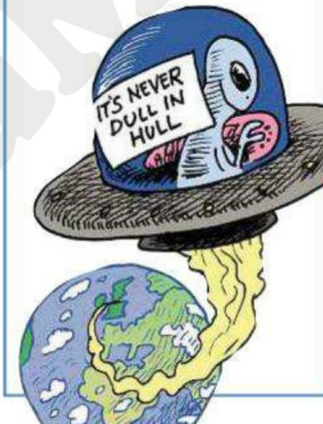
On 13 March, a dead cat was found frozen in ice at the Mile Zero Trailer Park in British Columbia, Canada. An animal welfare officer said: "The ice block, which looks to have been made from a large rubber bin, was left just a few doors down from where the corpse of a medium-sized black dog was found frozen inside a similar block of ice last year." *Victoria (BC) Times Colonist, 15 Mar 2012*.

TRIVIAL PURSUIT

A plainclothes policeman chased himself for 20 minutes in January after he was mistaken for a burglary suspect. A CCTV operator reported a man "acting suspiciously" in a side road, and the probationary Sussex police officer began to chase the elusive figure. Despite being told he was "on the heels" of his prey by the operator, the officer was always one step behind the elusive suspect. Then a sergeant came into the control room and realised that hunter and prey were the same person. *Sun, Metro, 8 Feb 2012*.

OUT OF THIS WORLD

An open day for Hull's latest educational institution was held on 28 January. Prospective pupils for the £48 million Sirius Academy "took part in a whole host of fun activities, from alien autopsies to dusting for alien fingerprints," according to the *Hull Advertiser* (2 Feb 2012), which added: "They were also given the chance to race aliens in the sports facilities."


IT'S NEVER DULL IN HULL

SIDELINES...

BASEMENT BEAR

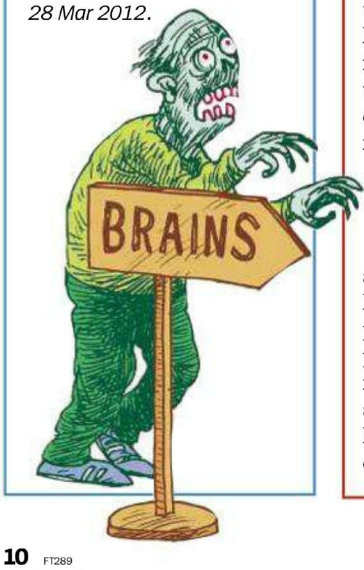
A cable TV repairman walked into the basement of a house in Hopatcong, New Jersey, to find a 500lb (230kg) bear asleep on the floor. It ambled out of the house before state Fish and Game officials arrived, but was put to sleep with a tranquilliser dart and relocated to a forest. *MX News (Sydney), 16 Dec 2011*.

CANINE BUSKER

Egypt, a "singing" Newfoundland dog, has become the first pet in the country to be awarded a busking permit, allowing him to howl in the street. He accompanies his musician owner Simon Cartlidge, barking and howling while Mr Cartlidge, a local teacher, sings and plays the guitar in Baxter Gate, Doncaster. *D.Telegraph, 9 Sept 2011*.

BRAINS ON SHOW

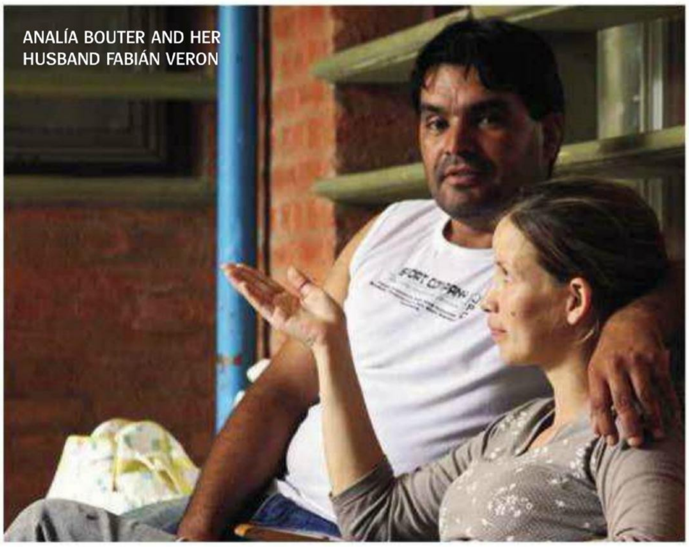
Slices of Einstein's brain went on display in Britain for the first time on 29 March with the opening of an exhibition at the Wellcome Collection in London, entitled "Brains: the Mind as Matter". This features mummified, desiccated, galvanised and pickled brains (including that of computing pioneer Charles Babbage) and charts humanity's attempts at scientific understanding. Einstein's brain slices normally reside at the Mutter Museum in Philadelphia. *Guardian, 28 Mar 2012*.



MARTIN ROSS

BACK FROM THE DEAD

MORE GREATLY EXAGGERATED DEMISES FROM AROUND THE WORLD


ANALÍA BOUTER AND HER HUSBAND FABIÁN VERON

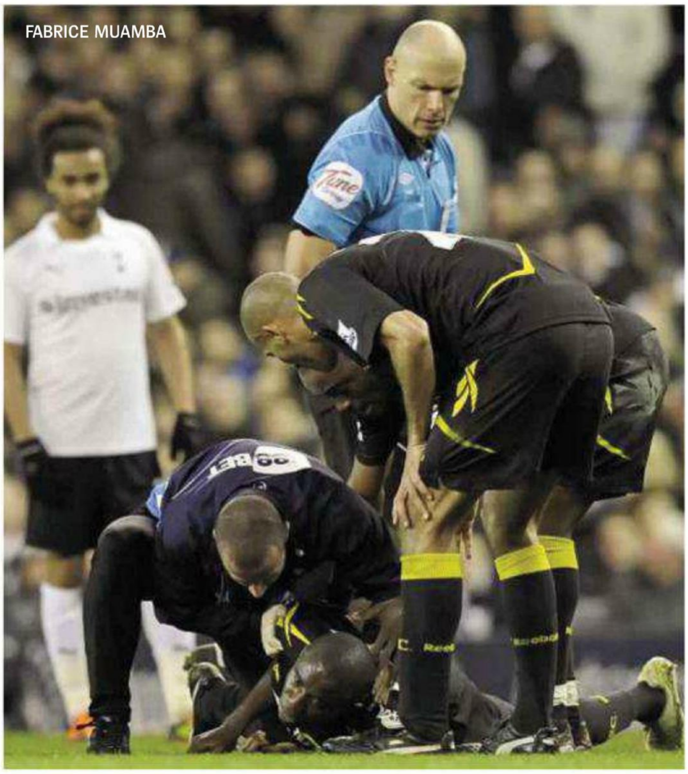
GETTY IMAGES / AFP

● A woman who gave birth to a "stillborn" baby found her alive in a hospital morgue 12 hours after doctors pronounced the infant dead. Analía Bouter, 29, from Fontana, northern Argentina, gave birth three months prematurely at the Perrando Hospital in the city of Resistencia, Chaco province, at 10.24am on 3 April. Mrs Bouter and her husband Fabián Veron (above) headed home, but returned in the evening, insisting that they wanted to say goodbye properly. They pulled the baby's coffin from a refrigerated drawer in the hospital morgue and prised open its nailed down lid to find the 29oz (820g) baby covered in frost. "I touched her hand," said Mrs Bouter. "I felt her look at me and when I saw her alive I fell to my knees. Then suddenly she let out a cry. She was freezing in there." She said that doctors told her: "Nobody knows how she could have survived 12 hours in a refrigerated room."

The little girl was to have been called Liliana Abigail, but her parents named her Luz Milagros, meaning Light Miracle. However, officials said that, like any baby born three months prematurely, she had only a 10 per cent chance of survival. The family plan to sue the hospital, and five medical professionals have been suspended. At the time of going to press, there had been no further news of the baby's condition. *D.Telegraph, Sun, 12 April; TNT Magazine, 16 April 2012*.

"Suddenly, she let out a cry. She was freezing..."

● Another mistaken diagnosis of stillbirth took place in south China on 26 October 2011. Liu Dongmei, eight months pregnant, was taken to the Nanhai Red Cross Hospital in Foshan city, Guangdong province, because of internal bleeding and stomach cramps. She had an emergency birth, but the baby was neither breathing nor crying when it was born and its skin had turned purple. When Ms Liu's sister-in-law asked to see the body about half an hour later, she was handed a yellow plastic bag containing the infant and found it was still alive. She was further shocked to find that it was a boy. Nurses had told the family the child was a girl in an effort to soften the blow of the death, as in China boys are traditionally viewed as more precious than girls. The child was in a stable condition at the time of the report, and four medical professionals were suspended pending


FABRICE MUAMBA

GETTY IMAGES / AFP / OLLY GREENWOOD

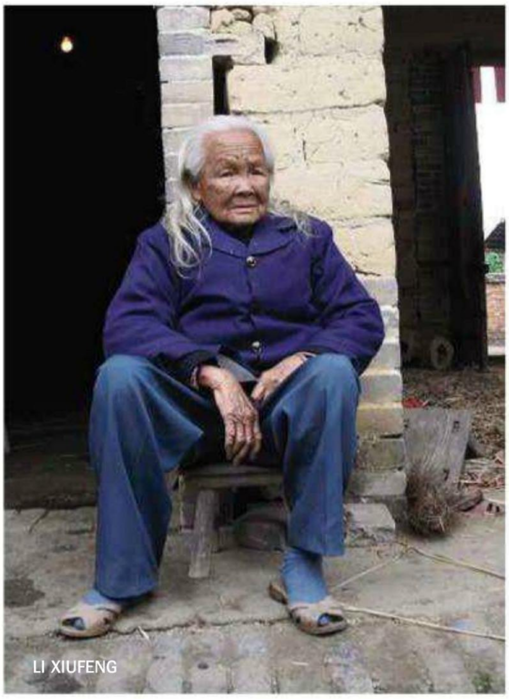
an investigation. *D.Telegraph, 5 Nov 2011.*

● The Congolese footballer Fabrice Muamba (who plays for Bolton Wanderers) famously came back from the dead recently, after suffering cardiac arrest on the pitch on 17 March (facing, bottom). Despite numerous defibrillator shocks, his heart stopped for 78 minutes, but two days later, it was beating without medication and he was able to move his limbs. He was discharged from hospital on 16 April. *BBC News, 19+21 Mar, 16 April 2012.*

● A 95-year-old Chinese woman terrified her village by climbing out of her coffin after being 'dead' for six days. On 17 February, Li Xiufeng (right) was found motionless and not breathing in bed by her neighbour more than a fortnight after tripping and suffering a head injury at her home in Liulou, Guangxi province. When he failed to wake her up, Chen Qingwang assumed the frail grandmother had passed way. He and his son made preparations for the funeral, including keeping the coffin unsealed in the house for friends and relatives to pay their last respects.

She was laid in the coffin on 19 February, and four days later, the day before the planned funeral, Chen Qingwang found the coffin empty and the corpse gone. "We were terrified and asked the neighbours to come and help," he said. The villagers were stunned to find the 'dead' woman sitting on a stool in her kitchen, cooking. "I slept for a long time," she told them. "After waking up, I felt so hungry, and wanted to cook something to eat. I pushed the lid for a long time to climb out." However, despite cheating death, the unfortunate woman was left with nothing as, according to custom, after a person dies, all their belongings must be burnt (though evidently this didn't include her stool and cooking utensils). *D.Mirror, 5 Mar 2012.*

● Lorna Baillie, 49, collapsed with a heart attack at her home in Prestonpans, East Lothian, at 4.30pm on 10 February. Doctors at Edinburgh's Royal Infirmary spent three hours trying to revive her before declaring her "technically dead" at 8.45pm, although they had to wait until she stopped breathing before declaring her medically dead. Then, 45 minutes later, as her husband whispered "I love you", her family saw her colour gradually improve and her eyelids flicker. A doctor then found a pulse and rushed her to intensive care. Two weeks later, she appeared to be making a good recovery. *Mail on Sunday, 26 Feb 2012.*



REX FEATURES / QUIRKY CHINA NEWS

● Rosa Celestrino de Assis was suffering from pneumonia and the effects of two strokes when doctors at a hospital in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, declared her dead at 7.30pm on 23 September 2011. Three hours later, her daughter, Rosangela Celestrino, went to pick up the body – already bagged up in a cold storage drawer at the mortuary and ready for collection. "I went to give my mum one last hug," she said, "and I could feel that she was breathing. I screamed out – my mum is alive! And they all looked at me like I was crazy." Rosa, in her sixties, was put back on life support. *stylist.co.uk, 26 Sept; Sun, 27 Sept; Sunday Times, 2 Oct 2011.*

● Child actor Lucy Hussey-Bergonzi, 14, from Hackney in east London, collapsed with a brain hæmorrhage in 2009 shortly after filming a small scene for *Harry Potter And The Half-Blood Prince.* She was on life-support at Great Ormond Street Hospital for five days before her parents were told she would not make it. They called in a Catholic priest to baptise her as they prayed and prepared to say their goodbyes. However, when the priest put holy water on her head, her arm shot up in the air. Within a day, she was off life-support machines and was showing signs of recovery. "Doctors were saying it was a miracle," said Lucy. "People who have brain hæmorrhages usually don't survive them." Lucy had to learn to talk, walk, and even eat again. Two years later, she was still suffering severe headaches and numbness down her right side. *Metro, 10 Aug 2011.*

● Rhianna Shaw, 23, from Chichester, West Sussex, was skiing off piste with five friends near St Anton in Austria on 16 February when she was buried in an avalanche. "There was several foot of snow on top of me," she said later. "You usually think snow will move, but it just sets like concrete around you." She was declared clinically dead after being buried in snow for 15 minutes – until CPR from a friend literally brought her back to life. She was flown to hospital and put on a drip, and a week later was making a good recovery. Her survival amazed medics, who said there was only a six per cent chance of resuscitation after being buried in snow for only eight minutes – and after 11 minutes, most skiers die. *D.Mail, Metro, 24 Feb 2012.*

The latest round-ups of the "Lazarus phenomenon" were in **FT262:10–11** *and* **FT280:26–27**.

SIDELINES...

COSMIC JOKER SCORES

Driving home after a four-hour driving safety course, rugby star Mark Cueto crashed into a concrete post (location unspecified). Meanwhile in Littlehampton, West Sussex, a talk to pensioners on how to stay safe during the cold snap was cancelled after organiser Jackie Morgan, 62, slipped on ice and sprained her ankle. *Sunday Mirror, 5 Feb 2012.*

HAIRY WINDFALL

The Tirumala Temple in India has earned more than £25.6 million from wig-makers around the world by selling 561 tons of human hair offered by Hindu devotees since September 2011. More than 40,000 pilgrims cut their hair at the temple, 370 miles (595km) southeast of Hyderabad in Andhra Pradesh, as an offering to Venkateswara, the presiding deity credited with granting their wishes. The temple is the most visited Hindu shrine in India and is believed to be the second richest religious body after the Vatican. *Irish Times, 29 Feb 2012.*

LIZARD'S ORDEAL

A rare Chioninia lizard survived a 3,500 mile (5,600km) flight in a tourist's suitcase – six hours in the freezing hold – then a full cycle in her washing machine. The 6in (15cm) reptile sneaked into Sue Banwell-Moore's luggage in the Cape Verde Islands off West Africa. She spotted it while hanging out her holiday wash in Churchinford, Somerset, and initially thought it was dead. It was identified and taken in by the Tropiquaria wildlife park in Watchet. *D.Telegraph, Sun, 8 Feb 2012.*

COLLECTIVE ILLUSION

A village of 23 houses near Berne in Switzerland, costing £17 million, will provide a fake reality for 150 dementia sufferers, with carers disguised as gardeners, hairdressers and shop assistants. The community, dubbed Dementiaville, will have a cinema and shops and is set to open in 2017. *D.Mail, 31 Jan 2012.*

SIDELINES...

DANGEROUS DINING

Puffer fish, the highly prized but occasionally fatal delicacy, is currently forbidden to be served in Japanese restaurants unless the chef has been specially trained and received a licence to remove the poison. However, the number of deaths has fallen in recently years and officials in Tokyo are planning to pass a bill that will allow unlicensed chefs to process and sell the fish. *D.Telegraph, 7 Mar 2012*.

RABBIT GETS BOOT

Til, a 17-day-old rabbit born without ears at a small zoo in Limbach-Oberfrohna in Saxony, was due to be presented to the world at a press conference on 15 March. However, after being filmed the day before, Til was put down on the pen floor and burrowed into some hay. A TV cameraman then took a step back and crushed the rabbit to death with his boot. Officials were deliberating whether to have Til stuffed. *Irish Times, Metro, 16 Mar 2012*.

A WEE PROBLEM

In the fortnight up to 7 October 2011, almost 300 bottles of urine were found in ditches and fields on the outskirts of Cork city in Ireland. Initially, a farmer found dozens of pee-filled Coke bottles near Glanmire, north-east of the city, and then plastic bags filled with Fanta bottles of pee turned up in Crosshaven, 15 miles (24km) south-east of the city. Gardaí stumped. *Irish Independent, 7 Oct 2011*.

PEE-TOTALLER

A 53-year-old US woman called Carrie has drunk five glasses of her own urine every day for five years. She also brushes her teeth with it, rinses out her eyes and applies old pee as an ointment all over her body. The cancer patient hopes it will aid her recovery. "I like warm pee – it's comforting," she said. Nutrition expert Michael Stroud said people who believed urine could cure diseases were "daft as brushes". *MX News (Sydney), 19 Mar 2012*.

FOWL WEATHER FORECAST

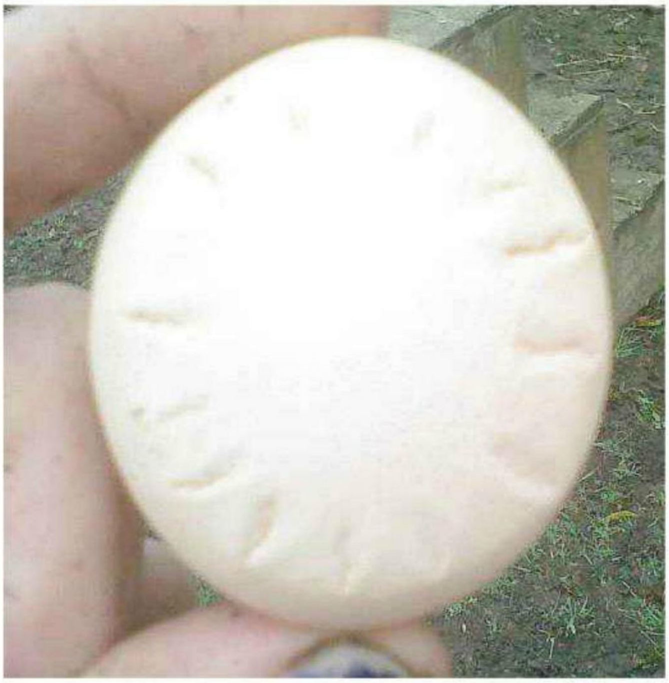
Harley Davidson

© BAYLISMEDIA / SOLENT NEWS

EGGS' FORECAST

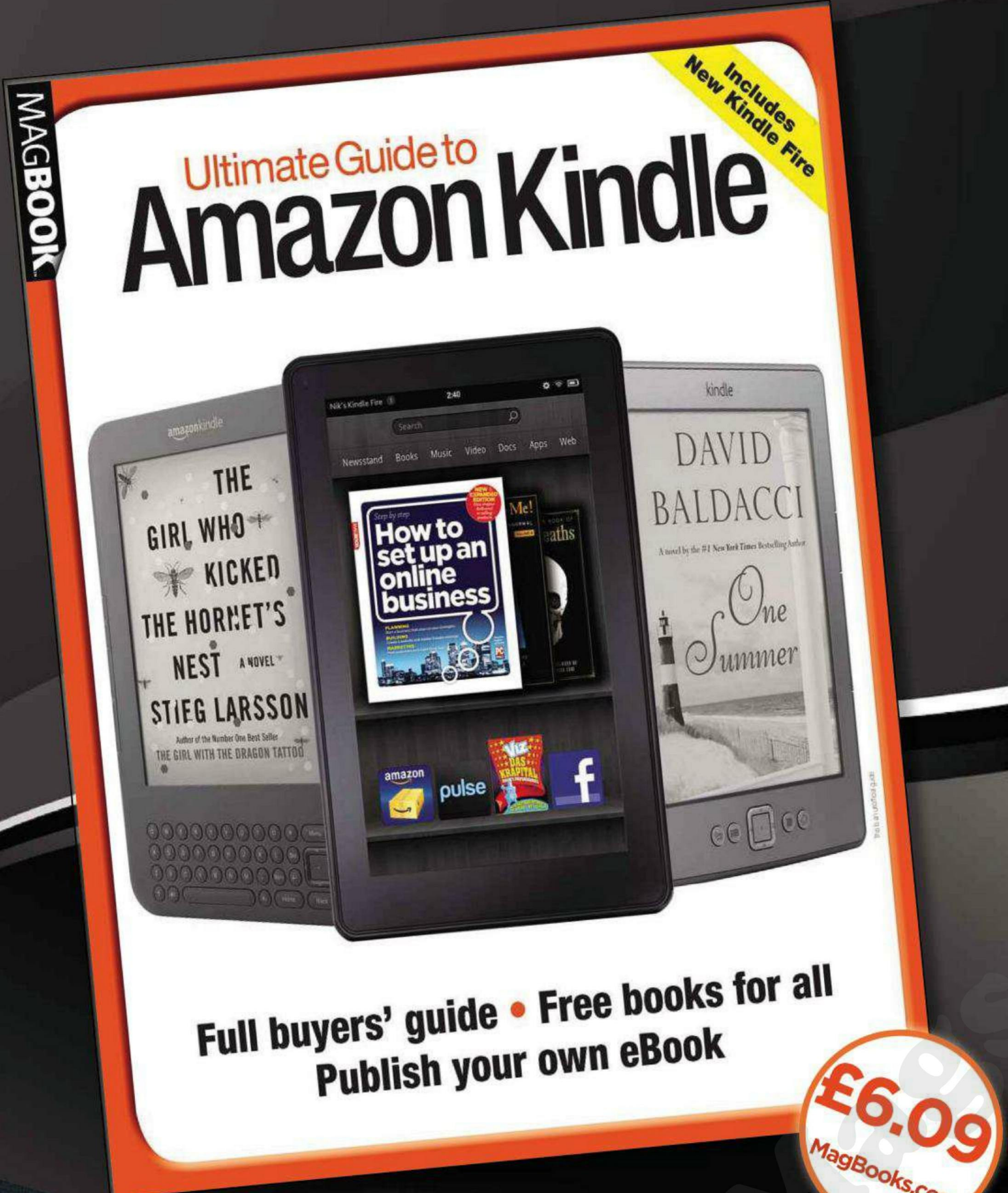
According to her owners, a hen called Rosie predicts the weather by markings on her eggs. In mid-February, for instance, a day of clear skies and sunny spells was foretold by one pale clear egg and one with orange spots. About a week earlier, two gloriously sunny days were both predicted by eggs with indented marks in the shape of a shining sun.

Owner Sacha Anderson, 30, from Maidenhead in Berkshire, said: "When she began laying these eggs, I couldn't believe it. It just seemed like magic. In August the eggs had strange Sun rays on them, and those were some of the hottest days of the year. Last week [6–12 Feb], they had a speckled appearance I had never seen before, just like snowflakes, and then we had a snowfall. My children started running around and were really excited, saying: 'Rosie can tell the weather'. It's happened quite a few times now. She would probably give the Met Office a run for its money. I don't watch the television weather news now. When you've got Rosie, why bother?" The Andersons bought the Maran breed hen from a farm shop in July 2011 as a present for children Ella, eight, and Curtis, six. *D.Mail, 17 Feb 2012.*



© BAYLISMEDIA / SOLENT NEWS

TOP: The Anderson family with Rosie, a Maran breed hen said to predict the weather in the markings on her eggshells. **ABOVE:** This egg seemed to show the Sun's rays – on a particularly sunny day.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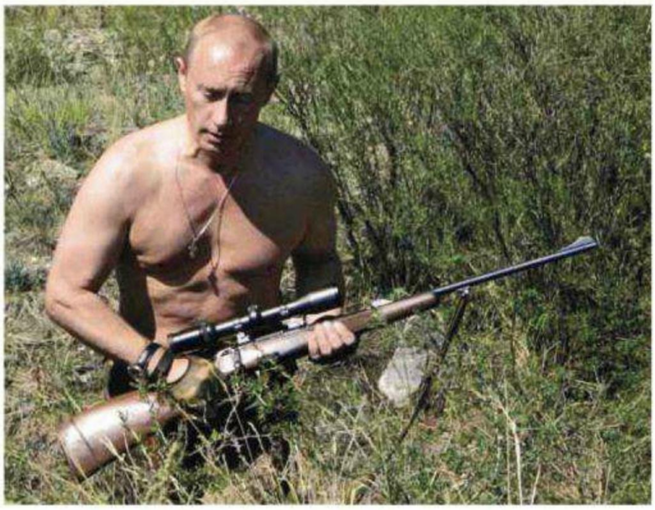
MATT PATTINSON

PUTIN'S NEW ARSENAL

The world's Great Powers are constantly updating their military capacity, but, wonders **DAVID HAMBLING**, how much of it is real and how much bluff?



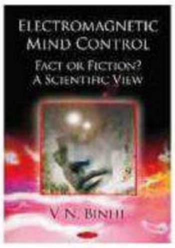
GETTY IMAGES / AFP / DMITRY ASTAKHOV

Fortean Times has noted the slew of recent media reports, led by our very own *Daily Mail*,[1] warning that the Russians were developing a 'zombie gun' which attacks the nervous system [**FT288:6**]. At the same time, US news media criticised the Russians for threatening new biological weapons.[2] These were different aspects of a bigger and altogether weirder story.

The original source of the furore was an article by Vladimir Putin himself in *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*[3] on the strategic military balance. He indicated that Russia needed new types of weapon: "Such hi-tech weapons systems will be comparable in effect to nuclear weapons but will be more 'acceptable' in terms of political and military ideology." Shortly afterwards, Russian news media quoted Defence Minister Anatoly Serdyukov as stating that a number of such weapons would be included in this December's defence budget.[4]

What they are actually talking about is a mixture of wildly different technologies. Putin's article mentions "weapons systems based on new principles (beam, geophysical, wave, genetic, psychophysical and other technology)", while Serdyukov talked about "direct-energy weapons, geophysical weapons, wave-energy weapons, genetic weapons, psychotronic weapons, etc."

Western journalists interpreted these statements as a new threat, which might suit some interests. Even now, some Pentagon general might be rounding up his PowerPoint presentation in the Oval Office with the words: "Mr President, we cannot allow a psychotronic weapons gap…"



A closer inspection of the named technologies suggests that the Russian leadership is taking a deep dive into fortean waters, and badly needs to check who's selling these things.

Take the outré field of "geophysical weapons" which cause earthquakes or change the weather. Man-made earthquakes are a reality. The term 'induced seismicity' describes tremors caused by human activity including mining, building reservoirs and – lately – 'fracking', the hydraulic fracturing of rocks to extract gas. Electric discharges into the ground can trigger tremors. There has been significant Russian work in this field[5] and a Russian academician suggested a 'tectonic weapon' in 1992. However, nobody has yet figured out how to predict or control induced seismicity, and its military use is fanciful at best.

The only people who seem to believe in such weapons are the conspiracy theorists who focus on the HAARP installation in Alaska [**FT174:14**]. This is an array of antennæ pumping energy into the ionosphere. It can certainly change the electromagnetic environment close to space (affecting communications and sensors), but its supposed ability to cause earthquakes lacks any known factual support, in spite of numerous claims.

"Psychotronics" to control a brain remotely – the 'zombie gun' – are equally doubtful. Vladimir Binhni, a physicist at the General Physics Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences, described the Russian work on psychotronics in his 2010 book *Electromagnetic Mind Control: Fact or Fiction?* His conclusion was not encouraging: "Far too much attention has been drawn to the fact itself that such studies took place and nothing was said about the result of these studies. However, the results were more disappointing than satisfying, at least to the author of the present book, who was one of the top researchers at these institutions."

Russia could scare Western media with a technology based on magic

Russian research into wave-type weapons, including "scalar weapons" and "torsion fields", absorbed quantities of roubles and produced enough pseudoscience to keep fringe-watchers busy for years, without any tangible results. The Soviets started military research into torsion fields in 1987. These are supposedly energy fields with electrical and gravitational effects. The aim was to develop weapons which could shoot down ballistic missiles and blast entire populations, but a review by the USSR Academy of Sciences in 1991 concluded that torsion fields were simply a scam to get money from the state.[6] Quite a successful scam too, netting some 500 million roubles (roughly £10,500,000). Some of the scientists who worked on torsion fields are still out there peddling their wares in the free-market economy.

The 'genetic weapons' mentioned are a DNA-twist on the usual germ warfare. In 1997, William Cohen, then US Secretary of Defense, used the term 'genetic weapon' to refer to engineered bacteria and viruses which only harmed people from certain ethnic groups. There was concern that the Russians were working in this field. There was supposedly also an Israeli programme to make Arab-specific biological weapons, and in South Africa the apartheid regime's 'Project Coast' included weapons that would only target certain groups.

However, the Israel story turned out to be a hoax, and Project Coast never produced an ethnic weapon. Biologists are sceptical about such weapons, because ethnicity is not a matter of simple genetics and bacteria don't make racial distinctions. "It just doesn't make much sense from a scientific point of view," said Daphne Kamely, a microbiologist with the US Defense Department, about the alleged Israeli programme.[7]

Putin's new technology might be highly original and uniquely Russian, but there's little sign that any of it might work. In fact, he could hardly have chosen a more peculiar set of 'sciences'. It might scare Western media, but he could do that with a strategic arsenal based on magic, or rather "quantum psychophysical energy projection". Or perhaps that's one of the other technologies included in Serdyukov's "etc"?

Anyone with a Russian PhD and a technical-sounding weapons idea is advised to contact the Russian Defence Ministry before December. You will need the ability to keep a straight face and a suitcase for the cash.

NOTES

1 http://bit.ly/H4302G (dailymail.co.uk).

2 http://bit.ly/HoaNZx (miamiherald.com).

3 http://bit.ly/xNvyLc (premier.gov.ru).

4 http://bit.ly/GGnFJR (en.rian.ru).

5 http://bit.ly/y2zYVf (voltairenet.org).

6 http://bit.ly/lvShRP (humanism.al.ru).

7 http://bit.ly/I9QTRL (salon.com).

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ALLERGIC REACTIONS

SENSITIVE SOULS REACT TO ELECTRICITY, HAIR DYE – OR EVEN WATER, PREGNANCY, SEMEN OR SEXUALLY-TRANSMITTED NUT PROTEINS

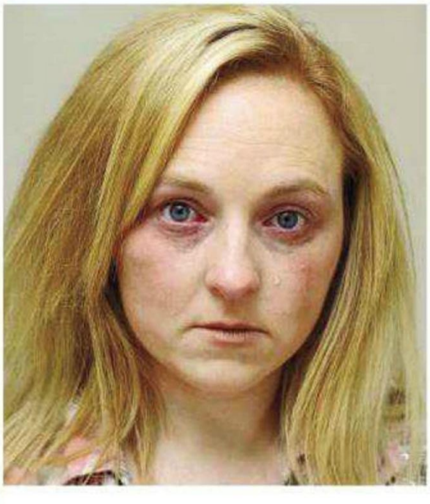
HOT SPOT MEDIA

- Janice Tunnicliffe, 55, from Wellow in Nottinghamshire, claims a course of chemotherapy during treatment for bowel cancer in 2008 left her with a rare (and disputed) condition called electro-sensitivity (ES), which causes severe reactions to the electromagnetic fields given off by electrical appliances. Since she developed the illness, she has suffered headaches, chest pains, nausea and tingling in her arms and legs whenever she is close to any electrical device. The windows of her cottage are shielded by metallic insulation and she spends her evenings playing board games by candlelight with her husband Carl, 43 (above). At weekends, they often camp in the countryside to give her a "complete break" from electrical signals.

The mother of two has thrown out the toaster, kettle and microwave oven, exiled the washing machine to an outhouse and persuaded neighbours to use cable Internet instead of wi-fi. "iPhones make me feel really sick within about 20 minutes of being near one," she said. "Wi-fi makes me feel like I have a clamp at the back of my head which is squeezing the life out of me. It's completely draining and a home hub can totally immobilise me – I'm left unable to move my arms and legs."

While medical authorities in some countries such as Sweden and Switzerland recognise ES as an objective condition, many doctors regard it as psychosomatic. A UK Health Protection Agency spokesman said: "There is little scientific evidence demonstrating it is the electromagnetic fields exposure that causes the symptoms." *D.Mail, Metro, D.Telegraph, 18 May 2011. For earlier examples of electro-sensitivity, see* ***FT86:16, 132:20, 142:14, 224:10***.

Janice has had to throw out electrical appliances and live by candelight



CATERS NEWS AGENCY

- Andrea McEwan, 26, suffers from severe hyperemesis gravidarum (HG), which acts like an allergic reaction to pregnancy. She began feeling ill about three weeks after becoming pregnant, and was admitted to hospital 10 times in nine months. "I was just constantly vomiting," she said. "I was sick 20 times a day – and that was on a good day. I couldn't even drink water. I had to go to hospital to be put on a drip because I was so dehydrated. I was like a skeleton. It was horrible. I really thought I was going to die." She lost 19kg (42lb) from her already petite frame. She also tore her œsophagus and damaged her teeth and gums from constant vomiting.

In October 2010 she gave birth to her son. She was still being sick during labour, but as soon as Kurt was born it stopped. "It was like flicking a switch," she said. "It was absolute hell from beginning to end, but every second was totally worth it for him." *MX News (Sydney), 18 Oct 2010.*

- Leticia Ortega, 36, from Fort Worth, Texas, is allergic to sperm: every time she has sex with her steady boyfriend, she swells up. She had no problems with her previous marriage that produced three children, aged 13 to 21. "The allergist said that I either became sensitive, or because I was married for so long, I was used to [my husband's] sperm," she said. She has seminal plasma hypersensitivity; the adverse symptoms are not from the sperm itself, but from proteins in the semen that carries it. She had the same reaction in another relationship just after her divorce.

The problem affects about 20,000 to 40,000 women in the US. The best treatment is to isolate the proteins in the man and do skin testing on the woman to determine which are to blame. The woman can then be injected with a small amount of the offending protein to desensitise her reaction, just like the treatment for bee sting allergy. *ABC News (New York), 13 May 2011.*

- A woman has become the first person to suffer an allergic reaction to nuts triggered by sexual intercourse. The boyfriend of the unnamed 20-year-old had eaten a handful of brazil nuts just before the couple's passion took hold. Knowing that she was allergic to the nuts, she asked him to take extreme precautions, so he brushed his teeth, washed his hands and scrubbed under his fingernails. But after sex, the lower part of the woman's body swelled up and she became short of breath, alerting scientists to the fact that nut proteins can get into the seminal fluid. Doctors at St Helier Hospital in Surrey took semen samples from the man before and after eating brazil nuts, and used them to conduct allergy tests on the woman. They found that her skin swelled up and his semen caused a reaction even three to four hours after eating the nuts. They were unable to conduct further tests because the couple split up. *MX News (Sydney), 11 Oct 2011.*

- Julie McCabe, 38, was left in a coma after an apparent allergic reaction to hair dye. The estate agent and mother of two is on a life-support machine in the intensive care unit at Airedale General Hospital, Keighley, West Yorkshire, after using a L'Oréal Preference home-colour kit on 30 October 2011. She began to experience breathing difficulties and her husband rushed her to hospital, but her heart stopped on the six-minute journey. It is believed that a chemical in the hair dye called para-phenylenediamine (PPD) caused the reaction. This is used in permanent hair dye to colour light or grey hair a darker shade. Mrs McCabe's family have been warned that she may never wake, and are campaigning for PPD to be banned. *Metro, Sun, 21 Nov 2011.*

● Katie Dell, 26 (facing, centre), suffers from aquagenic urticaria, which means she is hyper-sensitive to water – and can't even shed a tear without getting a rash. She can't watch weepy films or go out in the rain. She has had to give up her job as a dance teacher in Flint, North Wales as sweat brings her out in hives. The trouble began a decade ago when she suffered a reaction to penicillin. Her husband has to do most of the work around the house, but she said: "I don't let it get me down." *Metro, 16 Dec 2011.*

There are said to be only 35 people in the world who suffer from the complaint, for which there is no known cure. Another victim is Rachel Prince, 24, from Ripley in Derbyshire; even a kiss on the cheek from her fiancé Lee Warwick would cause a rash. The part-time model was diagnosed with the condition in 2004 – though she had noticed the allergy four years earlier.

"When I have a bath I am only in it for a few minutes and then the rash is so itchy and painful I have to lie down afterwards," she said. "I carry an umbrella everywhere and I have a coat with a huge hood on it like Kenny from *South Park*. When I drink water, it feels like my throat is closing up. Fruit juice and tea are not so bad for some reason. We'd like to have kids someday, but it's something we would have to consider carefully as I wouldn't be able to take care of all the washing and cleaning. Plus, I would hate to pass this on to my child and, with it being so rare, no one is able to say whether I would or not." *D.Mirror, Metro, 14 Feb 2012.*

2012 WATCH

TED HARRISON CATCHES UP WITH ANOTHER PERSISTENT END-TIME PROPHET

BROTHER MIKE: PROPHECY FAIL

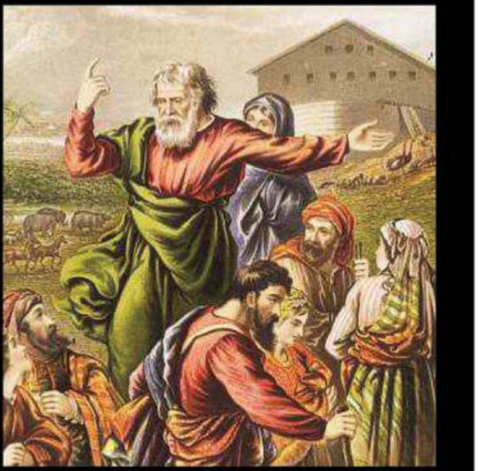
The 90-year-old radio evangelist Harold Camping might have retired from prophecy, but one of his followers is still hard at work rummaging through the Bible looking for apocalyptic clues. Known to his online followers as Brother Mike, he has now refined his 2011 doomsday prediction to 2012.

Initially, he was hoping for the Rapture in the second week of March to coincide with the Jewish festival of Purim. The festival celebrates the Old Testament Queen Esther, and while Brother Mike follows his mentor Harold Camping in believing that the story of Noah holds the key to interpreting the date for the end of the world, his latest research has sent him trawling through the Book of Esther for additional clues.

In February, he told his followers: "It is possible that The End will come on Purim. And I hope it does." Purim is the Jewish holiday when traditionally the story of Esther is read aloud in synagogues and members of the congregation whirl a rattle called a *gragger* whenever the name of the villain, Haman, is mentioned.

Yet, perhaps chastened by 2011's failures, Brother Mike hedged his bets. "I am just not satisfied that the entire literal flood account of Genesis 8, which is a foreshadow of the spiritual flood that began on May 21, will be fulfilled at the time of Purim. It seems to me that it is more likely to be completely fulfilled near the end of May in accordance with seeing the length of the flood to be 370 days as it was in the days of Noah. If this be the case, we can expect the dry ground of heaven to come 370 days after May 21, which is May 25."

Brother Mike had initially been a high-profile advocate of the May 2011 prophecy, appearing in numerous radio interviews across the USA. On 19 May last year, he posted what he thought would be his last online message: "I am now receiving up to hundreds of emails a day, and I must surrender to the fact that I will not be able to get to most of your emails before May 21. And, beginning Friday, I am completely resigned to spend the last day with my family members. PLEASE PRAY FOR MY FAMILY (wife, 5 kids and I) as most do not believe they are saved."



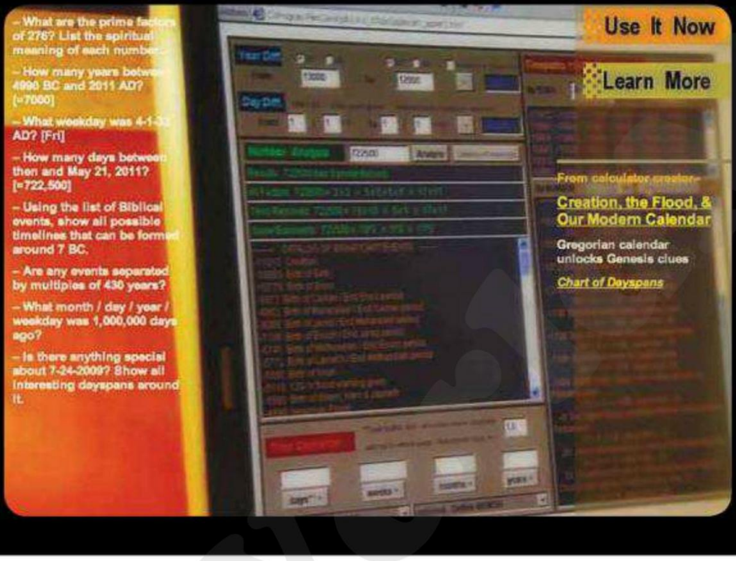
GETTY IMAGES / HULTON ARCHIVE

After the Doomsday that wasn't, Mike concurred with Harold Camping's revised date of 21 October for the physical destruction of the world. Later, he promoted 28 October and then 28 December, before going for March and then May 2012. "It doesn't matter how many hypotheses we come up with," he has said, as each one leads us "closer and closer to truth".

Brother Mike is careful to keep his identity a mystery. "Who I am is not important," he tells his followers, describing himself as "just another voice crying out in the wilderness". Like Camping, he hails from California and trained as a science teacher.

It looks likely that Brother Mike will continue to name dates as 2012 continues. "We have stated certain possibilities only and will likely continue to do so until we are more certain toward a given hypothesis."

He will soon be challenging for the title of the world's most unsuccessful end-time prophet, rapidly catching up with the Californian-based radio preacher Charles Taylor from the organisation 'Today in Bible Prophecy'. Taylor predicted the rapture in 1975, 76, 80, 81, 82, 83, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 92 and 94 – 13 failures in total!



– What are the prime facto of 276? List the spiritual meaning of each numbe

– How many years betwe 4990 BC and 2011 AD? [=7000]

– What weekday was 4-1-3 AD? [Fri]

– How many days betwee then and May 21, 2011? [=722,500]

– Using the list of Biblical events, show all possible timelines that can be form around 7 BC.

– Are any events separated by multiples of 430 years?

– What month / day / year / weekday was 1,000,000 days ago?

– Is there anything special about 7-24-2009? Show all interesting dayspans around it.

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MATT PATTINSON

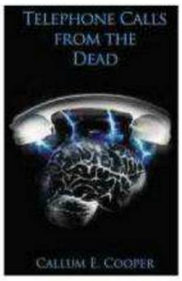
ALAN MURDIE discovers that sometimes the departed can still make contact by phone.

DAVID SUTTON

LATE CALLERS

In a nice piece of synchronicity, the story of posthumous emails seemingly originating from a man who died in Pennsylvania in 2010 and the topic of telephone calls from the dead appeared in the last issue [**FT288:9**] just as the first book devoted to this unusual topic for over 30 years was being published. In *Telephone Calls From the Dead* (2012), Cal Cooper has re-opened the study into this strange topic, from an academic and parapsychological standpoint. He states: "With the advancement of technology e.g. mobile phones, text messages, emails, and so on, more and more people in recent times have reported anomalous communication regarding the dead and the living with use of these modern forms of communication."

It is all too common in the history of psychical research that the pioneering work of individual investigators is abandoned on their death or retirement from the field. Until picked up by Cooper, that seemed to have been the fate of the research undertaken for the book *Phone Calls From the Dead* (1979) by D Scott Rogo (1950–1990) and Raymond D Bayless (1920–2004). Their book generated a great deal of controversy and experts have been divided ever since. On one side were those hailing the book as a study that "courageously examined claims by people to have had telephone contact with those who, by conventional wisdom, are no longer in a position even to dial a number, let alone conduct a meaningful conversation", to quote the late Hilary Evans (*Journal of the SPR*, vol.58 1991–92, 111). In opposition was the scorn directed at the book by hardened sceptics such as psychologist Robert C Baker, who included a sarcastic critique in his book *Hidden Memories: Voices and Visions From Within* (1992), mockingly entitled "Calling All Corpses, Dial D for Dead". Thereafter, although interest has grown enormously in the passive recording of anomalous electronic voices – known variously as Electronic Voice Phenomena (EVP) or Instrumental Transcommunication (ITC) – it seems almost nobody wanted to ring the bell for telephone calls from the dead. Perhaps it is the inherent spookiness of the whole concept that explains this reluctance. It is surely one thing to experiment and record an unheard anomalous voice which is revealed later, but quite another to receive a direct telephone call without warning from someone known or discovered to be dead – thus being put on the spot and obliged to engage in a conversation.



The phone rang, and his mother's voice used his old 'baby' nickname

As a psychology student in 2008, Cooper came across Rogo and Bayless's book and decided to follow up their research. Using both further examples collected by Rogo and Bayless and new cases resulting from his own research, Cooper has published a study of the phenomenon for the 21st century.

His research has also discovered that experiments in this field go back a long way. In 1913, a London solicitor named David Wilson conducted inconclusive experiments with a wireless telegraph, and a work on what Cooper terms an "interdimensional telephone" was published by a medium named Francis Grierson in a book entitled *Psycho-Phone Messages* (1921), channelling messages from Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln and others. A further discovery has been a forgotten book published in Brazil in 1925 entitled *The Voice Beyond The Telephone* by a medium named Oscar D'Agonnell, who claimed to have had numerous conversations with spirits.

Cooper records how the original publication of Rogo and Bayless's book caused many people to come forward with stories including "a number of psychologists [who] approached Rogo and Bayless stating that they too had had similar bizarre telephone experiences, but never considered discussing them".

In this regard, I have one such contribution, which I have already sent to Cal Cooper. It is an experience which befell writer and broadcaster Dennis Bardens (1911–2004 – obit **FT201:26**), founder of BBC's *Panorama* and author of several books on paranormal topics. It is published here for the first time.

I was legal adviser to Dennis Bardens in the last five years of his life, assisting him with his copyrights, publishing rights and contracts. Between 2000 and 2003, I often stayed at his mews flat in Notting Hill Gate, London, where he had moved with his family in 1957 and where he lived alone after the death of his wife in the mid-1980s.

I noticed he was always keen to have company in his flat at night; one of his friends told me he had developed a fear of the dark in recent years. A possible explanation for this unease came with a story he told me of a strange experience with a telephone at home that had frightened him. He believed he had undergone a number of psychic experiences in his life – some of which are described in his books, *Ghosts and Hauntings* (1965) and *Mysterious Worlds* (1971) – but this one was quite unlike any other.

Dennis was a great lover of gadgets and computers, which he used for amusement as well as creative work. He told me that late one night around the year 2000, he was sitting at his desk, amusing himself with an old computer, doodling with the mouse to create a crude drawing of a ghost on the screen.

He had two telephones in his flat: one was an ordinary landline and the other was disconnected, left over from a period in this life when he had worked for British Intelligence. This secret telephone was considered defunct, having never rung since the 1960s. Suddenly he heard a telephone ringing. It was not his landline, but the telephone that had been silent for over 30 years. Startled, he picked up the telephone and answered it. On the line a woman's voice said one word, "Tim!" – then the line went dead.

What disturbed Dennis most was the fact that he recognised the voice of the caller: it was that of his mother, who had been dead for many years. In fact, his mother abandoned him when he was three years old, deserting him and his father for another man and moving abroad. Furthermore, Dennis had his own family nickname as a child – it had been Tim.

At the time, I didn't really know what to make of this story, perhaps because it fitted neither my own, nor Dennis's ideas about ghostly phenomena. He did not offer any theory as to what lay behind this experience, or seek to discuss it further. Although his physical health was not good – he was suffering from bladder cancer that he endured for many years – mentally he was still very alert and active. It might seem implausible that a person would remember the voice of their mother from the age of three, but it is not impossible. Certainly, Dennis believed he had heard his dead mother's voice that night.

As Cooper recognises, there are many possible explanations for such experiences, and at this stage we can only collect them to see if any sense can be made of the accounts. However, it may be that there are more attempts of anomalous communication going on than we realise, though where these calls originate from is a wide open question.

Strange telephone calls have been noted in poltergeist cases, often being dismissed as the work of pranksters (see William Roll: *The Poltergeist*, 1972). Claims of disconnected telephones ringing have also been made in haunted premises such as the 15th-century George and Dragon pub at Fordwich in Kent, haunted by a ghost known as "the Lady with the Green Hat", where an unconnected telephone has been heard ringing in the bar. (*Kentish Gazette, Canterbury & District Edition*, 22 Mar 2007.) Earlier the same year, Robin Priestley, manager of the Prince Charles Cinema in London, compiled a casebook of strange incidents at the cinema. These included a projectionist sleeping over the projection room (pictured below) receiving a telephone call from the locked and empty projection room below. (*West End Extra*, 9 Feb 2007.)

ETIENNE GILFILLAN

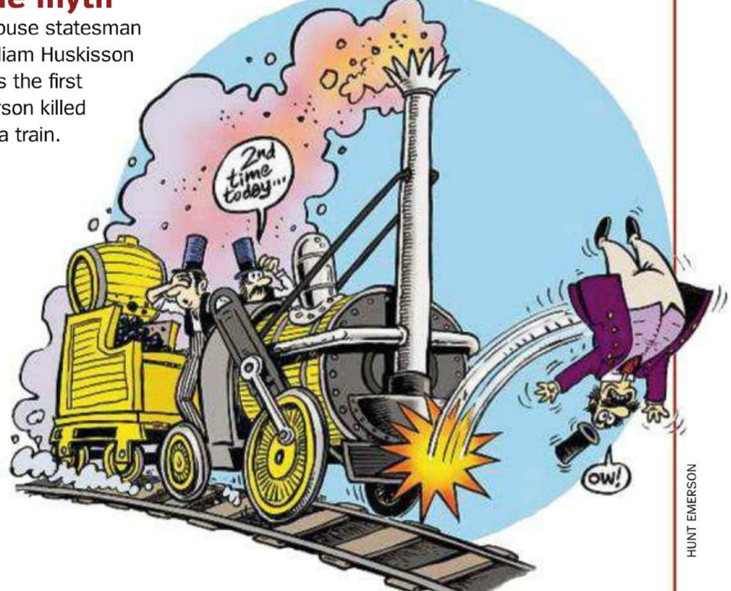
Mythconceptions

by Mat Coward

155: THE FIRST RAILWAY FATALITY

The myth

Scouse statesman William Huskisson was the first person killed by a train.



HUNT EMERSON

The "truth"

He may have been the first *famous* railway victim, but he was not the first. William Huskisson, Member of Parliament for Liverpool, fell into the path of Stephenson's *Rocket* at Parkside on 15 September 1830, during celebrations to mark the opening of the Liverpool and Manchester Railway, and died hours later of his injuries. The L&MR was the world's first full railway service, and Huskisson's lasting fame was quickly cemented. *The Times*, in its obituary of Lord Palmerston (18 October 1865), referred to "Poor Huskisson", who was "all his life a bungler. He was always in difficulties through his clumsiness, which was physical as well as moral. He was always stumbling over chairs, tripping against ropes as he landed from steamboats, breaking his shins upon stones, until at last he was knocked down and killed outright [*sic*] by the first railway train." But in fact, the parish register of Egglescliffe, near Stockton-on-Tees, records the death in 1827 (1825 in some sources) of an unknown female, possibly a "blind beggar woman", who was "killed by the steam machinery on the railway".

Sources

Chris Birch: *The milk jug was a goat*, Pegasus, 2008; also *Great Victorian lives*, Times Books, 2007; http://bit.ly/HYuqIF (btp.police.uk); http://bit.ly/JnhkVq (egglescliffeandeaglescliffe-pc.org.uk); http://bit.ly/JujRB9 (guardian.co.uk).

Disclaimer

Presumably, there must have been even earlier deaths – of navvies, for instance – in the prehistory of railways, but there, perhaps, it depends how you define your terms. If you have details to add which might get us onto the right lines, please feel free to let off steam on the letters page.

Update

Another entry for our growing collection of auto-lookalikes (**FT152:26**, **180:26**, **225:17**, **257:19**, **281:21**); according to Radio 4's *The Unbelievable Truth* (23 Jan 2012), Graham Greene once came second in a "write like Graham Greene" competition.

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FORTEAN FOLLOW-UPS

Further details on stories previously covered in *Fortean Times*

RAISED BY DOGS [FT250:22]

Fortean Times
INVIZIKIDS!

Last November, social workers rescued two sisters who lived as animals after being cared for by dogs. Elena, six, communicated by barking, but four-year-old Varvara made no noise at all. The sisters were neglected by alcoholic parents and lived and slept with four dogs and eight cats in a squalid flat in St Petersburg, Russia. The girls, who had never eaten hot food, are now in an orphanage. "When they arrived, they waited until the food was cold before eating," said an official. "They even tried to lick the hands of the adults providing it." *Sun, 3 Dec 2011.* For other children recently raised by dogs, see **FT45:44, 80:8, 150:9, 161:20–21, 185:8–9, 189:9, 252:17**. For a comprehensive history of feral children, see **FT161:34–41**.

ORANGE LAGOON GOO [FT280:11]

Fortean Times

The bizarre orange goo that invaded and baffled the remote Inuit village of Kivalina in north-west Alaska last August has been identified. Researchers from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) first believed that it was created by millions of tiny crustacean eggs, then declared it was actually a mass of spores from a type of rust fungus – so named for its distinctive orange colour – though in a quantity and location never before seen. However, they were unable to identify the species; the sample didn't match any other samples they had.

Conclusive identification came from collaboration between the American and Canadian Forest Services. "The identity of the rust has been revealed at last," wrote Jennifer Frazer in her "Artful Amoeba" blog for *Scientific American*. "It is the Spruce-Labrador Tea Needle Rust, *Chrysomyxa ledicola*, a parasite of both spruce trees and a rhododendron – a flowering woody shrub common to conifer understories the world over – called Labrador Tea." The mystery is why it turned up where it did for the first time ever – and in such vast quantities. *LiveScience.com, 7 Mar 2012.*

FOREST TEENAGER [FT281:4–5, 284:12]

Fortean Times
APOCALYPSE

Last September, a teenager turned up in Berlin claiming to have spent five years living in a forest with his father, Ryan, following the death of his mother, Doreen, in a road accident. After his father died, the boy buried him in a shallow grave and walked north to the German capital. When a four-month investigation involving Interpol found no evidence to confirm any part of this yarn, the authorities decided that "Ray" (as he called himself) was a fantasist with "mental health issues". Police checked almost every database of missing people in the world. "There are no data that match his," said a spokesman. "Several parents have contacted Berlin police hoping 'Ray' might be their child, but DNA tests never showed any connection." At the time of going to press, his identity remains unknown. *Sun, 18 Feb; Sunday Telegraph, 19 Feb 2012.*

FLOATING FEET [FT281:11]

Twelve severed human feet in trainers have washed up in the Pacific northwest since 2007 – nine in British Columbia and three in Washington State. Last May, the third and fifth feet to be discovered were identified as belonging to a 21-year-old man from Surrey, BC. Last October, two further feet, the fourth and seventh to be found – in May and November 2008 – were identified as belonging to a Canadian woman (name withheld) who had jumped to her death from the Pattullo Bridge in New Westminster, BC, in April 2004. On 4 November 2011, a foot in a hiking boot was washed ashore in Sasamat Lake, Port Moody, BC, and in February 2012 it was identified as belonging to Stefan Zahorujko, a fisherman whose boat was found overturned in the lake on 5 January 1987.

According to Stephen Fonseca, a British Columbia coroner, "most" of the feet belonged to suicide victims who had thrown themselves into the Fraser River, which flows into the Pacific near Vancouver. Their bodies decomposed, but the feet were preserved because they were in lightweight, rubber-soled sneakers, and were carried along the coast by the tide. Fonseca admitted that some of the deaths could have been accidental. This all sounds more like an informed guess than proof, despite headlines proclaiming that the "riddle" had been "solved". *ABC News, 21 Oct 2011; Vancouver Sun, 17 Feb; D.Mirror, D.Mail, 5 Mar 2012.*

FELINE SENTINELS [FT287:10]

Fortean Times
TITANIC PREMONITIONS

Since our round up of mummified cats concealed in houses to ward off evil spirits, vermin etc, a couple of other examples overlooked at the time have been found in the *FT* archives. In 1999, a cat was found above a fireplace in Moubray House in Edinburgh's Royal Mile by workers restoring a painted ceiling. There was a small fragment of a letter alongside it with the date 1725 in one corner, probably the date the cat was immured. Other items discovered in the room included a thimble, pipes and oyster shells. Moubray House is the oldest occupied building in Edinburgh. The frontage dates from about 1630, but the house was originally built around 1477. It is thought Daniel Defoe edited the *Edinburgh Courant* there in 1710.

In 2002, a mummified cat was found in the foundations of the Old Courthouse in Ipswich, Queensland, Australia, and was thrown away by a builder. Another had been found at some unspecified date in the Glengallan Homestead near Warwick, Queensland (built in 1867). *Edinburgh Eve. News, 22 Jan 2004; Queensland Times, 10 Dec 2009.*

HOLY THORN [FT272:8, 277:22]

Fortean T
ALIEN INVASION

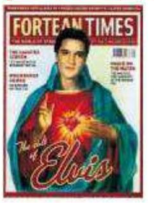
The 'holy' thorn bush on Wearyall Hill in Glastonbury, Somerset, was chopped down to a stump by vandals on 8 December 2010, but showed signs of recovery the following March. According to legend, the tree had grown from the staff of Joseph of Aramathea around AD 63, but in fact this particular thorn was planted in 1952. A new tree was planted on 1 April 2012, but a fortnight later was reduced to an 18in (46cm) stump. "Whilst there are those who might hack away, they can never destroy what is in people's hearts and hopes," said Morgana West, manager of the Glastonbury Pilgrim Reception Centre. *Western Morning News, 30 Aug 2011; D.Telegraph, 18 April 2012.*

BOY BUDDHA [FT245:20]

Fortean Times

On 25 March 2012, police in Nepal rescued a Slovak woman being held by followers of a man some believe is a reincarnation of Buddha. Police official KP Sharma said the 35-year-old woman, identified only as Marichi, had been held in a forest where Ram Bahadur Bamjan had been meditating since 2005. She had been visiting Bamjan for the past year, but was reported to have been held captive for the previous two months. Mr Sharma said she had a broken arm and appeared to be scared, and was being kept in the police station for her protection. *[AP] 27 Mar 2012.*

THE JERUSALEM OSSUARY [FT166:19, 167:14]



The words "James [Yakov], son of Joseph [Yosef], brother of Jesus [Yeshua]" were found inscribed in Aramaic on an empty limestone ossuary (bone box) dated AD 63, and some biblical scholars hailed this as the first mention of the historical Jesus Christ, earlier even than the Gospels. According to the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus, James was stoned to death as a heretic in AD 62. While the names Yakov, Yosef and Yeshua were very common at the time, the statistical probability of them appearing together was slim, according to André Lemaire, a palæographer at the Sorbonne.

Seven years of trial, evidence from dozens of experts and a 475-page verdict has come no nearer to discovering whether or not the ossuary (below) is authentic. Judge Aharon Farkash of the Jerusalem District Court, citing reasonable doubt, acquitted Israeli collector Oded Golan, who was charged with forging the inscription. Golan claimed the ruling had put an end to what he said was a 10-year smear campaign against him. Hershel Shanks, editor of the Washington-based *Biblical Archæology*, said he was delighted, insisting the ossuary inscription was genuine. The Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA), which believes Golan's most high-profile items are forged, said the case shows the limits of science in proving fakes, but it also prompted museums and universities around the world to be more suspicious of finds of uncertain origin. In his ruling, Judge Farkash said he heard so many specialists with conflicting claims that he couldn't determine whether the ossuary was forged or not. He concluded: "This topic is likely to continue to be the subject of research in the scientific and archæological worlds, and time will tell." Or not.

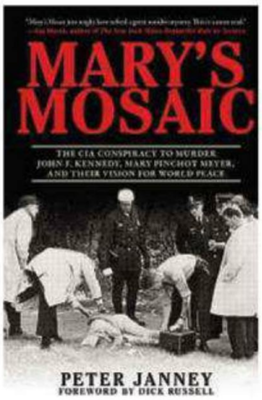
The saga began in 2002 when Golan sent the ossuary to Toronto's Royal Ontario Museum. He claims to have owned it since the late 1970s and never paid it much attention until Lemaire suggested the inscription might refer to the brother of Jesus. After the publicity, Golan started facing questions at home. At first, the IAA investigated whether he had transferred the box abroad without the proper licence. It also questioned the provenance of a stone tablet, inscribed with 15 lines in Hebrew, allegedly from the reign of King Yoash in the ninth century BC. Eventually, IAA experts concluded both were forgeries and police began to investigate.

Golan was indicted in late 2004, along with four other defendants, charged with forging and trading in dozens of stolen items. He was accused of adding the second half of the ossuary inscription, linking it to Jesus, and then fabricating the patina (surface layer accumulated over the passage of time) to pass it off as genuine. His trial began in 2005. He was convicted on four other charges, including trading in unlicensed antiquities, possessing stolen artefacts and selling artefacts without a licence. Robert Deutsch, an inscriptions expert, was acquitted of all charges. He was accused of forgery, but not in connection with the ossuary and the tablet. In earlier proceedings, one defendant reached a plea bargain, while charges against the remaining two were dropped. *pa.press.net via MSN UK News, Independent, 15 Mar; Metro, 16 Mar 2012.* See also **FT195:8**.

KONSPIRACY KORNER

ROBIN RAMSAY, EDITOR OF LOBSTER MAGAZINE, REPORTS FROM THE BUNKER ON...

KNOWN UNKNOWNS



When the news broke in mid-April about the United States Secret Servicemen whoring in a hotel in Colombia, JFK buffs smiled and thought, "I wonder how long it will be before they remember Dallas?" In the event, it took over a week before the story of JFK's Secret Service detail drinking in a club until five in the morning of the night before he was shot was retrieved by the collective memory of the mainstream media.[1]

And if you're thinking, "Oh no, not bloody JFK again!", by the time we've reached the end of 2013 you will be bored to distraction, because an avalanche of books and TV programmes will appear for next year's 50th anniversary of the Great Grassy Knoll Mystery.

Just ahead of that wave comes Peter Janney's *Mary's Mosaic: the CIA conspiracy to murder John F Kennedy, Mary Pinchot Meyer, and their vision for world peace* (Skyhorse, New York). You can check it out on Amazon.com, where two of the major JFK researchers have given it five stars. I wouldn't.

No, the author doesn't deliver what his subtitle promises. Of JFK and Meyer's "vision for world peace" there is little. Most of the book – the more reliable parts of the book – is about the life and death of Mary Meyer. And this is a great story. Meyer was the ex-wife of a major CIA officer, Cord Meyer, who ended his career as station chief in London in the 1970s.[2] After her divorce, Mary Meyer became a painter and a bit of a bohemian, smoking dope and taking LSD (the latter not then illegal). She became JFK's lover and introduced him to marijuana.[3] Or so she said. And maybe she wrote it in her diary – but the diary was removed by the CIA after her death.

When JFK was shot, Meyer was not fooled by the Warren Commission's whitewash and began making known her doubts. She was shot in 1964 while walking along a canal towpath. The Washington police tried and failed to convict a drunk African-American man for the killing.

Almost 50 years later, picking up where previous research into the event had stopped, Janney has solved the Meyer killing, identifying the shooter, but doesn't quite have the evidence to lay it at the CIA's door.

As for the Dallas killing, the new evidence Janney offers comes in the form of claims apparently made by a former senior CIA officer, the late Robert Crowley, to one Gregory Douglas, whose name might ring a bell. I've written about Douglas before (see **FT212:24**). He is a proven fabricator of documents and therefore untrustworthy. He claims to have recorded telephone conversations with the late Mr Crowley, but no one has heard them.[4] Janney is aware of Douglas's reputation, but persuades himself that his account of Crowley's account of Dallas *can* be relied on. Not in my book, it can't.

The Prez smoking dope in the White House is a fabulous image, but we only have reports of Meyer claiming this. The CIA might have killed JFK, but we still have no real evidence of that, either...

NOTES

[1] It appears that the story appeared first on a Dallas area TV station. See http://bit.ly/JuhLPN (wfaa.com).

[2] Cord Meyer would be on my 'probable' list of the people who were trying to destabilise the Harold Wilson governments of 1974–6. But I have no evidence.

[3] Search Google images for Mary Pinchot Meyer to find photographs of her with JFK.

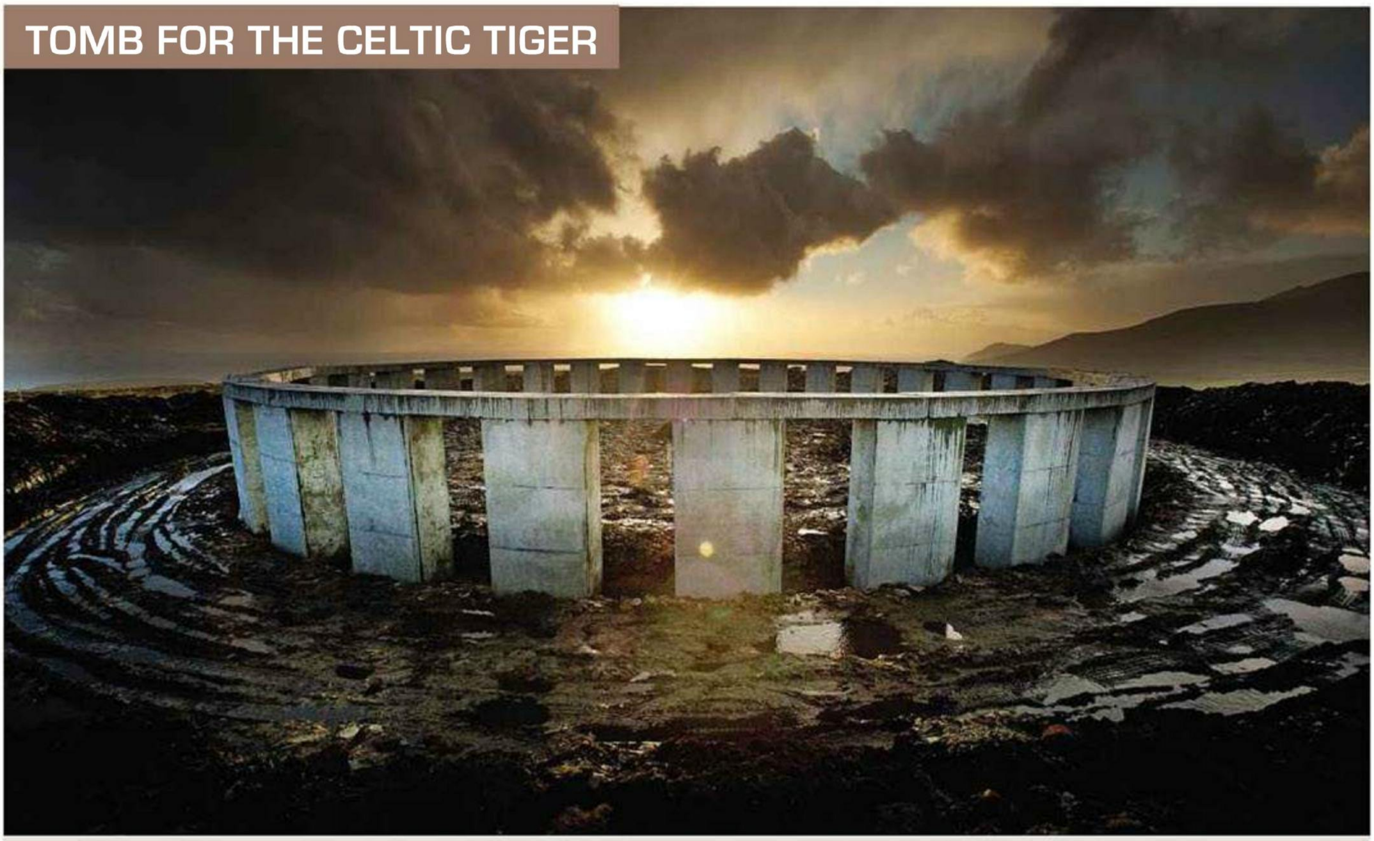
[4] Extracts from these conversations can be found by Googling "conversations with the Crow".

MATT PATTINSON

ARCHÆOLOGY

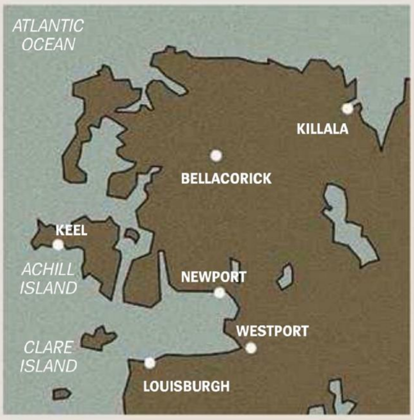
PAUL SIEVEKING reports on two sets of megalithic architecture – one a modern reconstruction of Stonehenge on an Irish island, the other the oldest known large stone structures, predating Stonehenge by 6,500 years.

TOMB FOR THE CELTIC TIGER



MICHAEL McLAUGHLIN

Over the weekend of 26/27 November, a faux megalithic structure appeared in a bog on top of a mountain near Keel on Achill Island, off the west coast of Ireland in Co. Mayo – in fact the largest island off the Irish coast. Believed to be more than six months in planning, the monument consists of 30 concrete columns in a circle, each nearly 4.5m (15ft) high, topped with lintels. Achill-henge, as it has been dubbed, is a little more than 100m (330ft) in circumference. Some see it as Ireland's latest tourist attraction, others as yet another example of wanton butchery of the landscape. Some speculated that Achill-henge would synchronise with the sunrise on the solstices and the equinoxes; those close to the project said that on pivotal dates in the calendar the Sun would illuminate a central 'megalith', yet to be erected. While hundreds of people gathered at Newgrange in Co. Meath to mark the Winter Solstice in late December, 12 also gathered at Achill-henge.



The man behind the structure is Joe McNamara, 41, a native of Achill Island who now lives in Salthill, Co. Galway. A one-time successful developer, he fell into financial difficulty in recent years and reportedly owes Anglo-Irish Bank 3.5 million euros. He was arrested in 2010 after driving a cement mixer bearing the words "Anglo" and "toxic bank" into the gates of Leinster House (the Irish Parliament) to protest about what he sees as the politicians' inept handling of the financial crisis, after which he was dubbed the "Anglo Avenger". He was acquitted of charges of criminal damage and dangerous driving.

According to Benny Meehan, one of McNamara's supporters, the concrete henge is intended to be a "place of reflection" where people can think about what has happened to Ireland in recent years in solitude. Others view Achill-henge as a daring art installation. "Some people have portrayed Joe as some kind of lunatic," said Meehan. "He is not. He is a quiet and reflective man."

Early human settlements are believed to have been established on Achill around 3000 BC. A paddle dating from this period was found at the crannóg near Dookinella. A railway once ran from Achill all the way east to Dublin. Every summer, teams of local people would leave to go picking potatoes in Scotland and England. In a long period of decline, the population fell, but during the recent boom years of the so-called Celtic Tiger, people returned; in 2006, the island population stood at 2,700. However, with financial bailouts and the economic downturn, emigration has once again become a fact of life.

As McNamara had not obtained planning permission for Achill-henge, Mayo County Council took out a High Court injunction against him on 26 November and demanded that work at the site must cease. When he ignored this and erected a further six columns, he was jailed for three days for contempt of court. He subsequently claimed that his monument – described as "primarily an ornamental garden sited on agricultural lands" – didn't require planning permission because it was an exempted development within the meaning of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001. The County Council disagreed, but at the time of going to press the matter is still unresolved. *Irish Times, 30 Nov, 3+8 Dec 2011, 16 Mar 2012; Irish Independent, 3 Dec; Sunday Independent (Ireland), 4 Dec; Irish D.Star, 22 Dec 2011; Irish D.Mail, 14 Jan 2012.*

FIRST TEMPLES OR JUST A HOME?

Ancient structures in southeastern Turkey thought to be the world's oldest temples may not have been strictly religious buildings, according to archæologist Ted Banning of the University of Toronto. He argues that the early Neolithic buildings found at Göbekli Tepe – more than 11,000 years old – may have been houses for people, not their gods. The site, on a hilltop just outside Sanliurfa (previously Edessa and then Urfa), was found in 1995 by Klaus Schmidt of the German Archæological Institute and his Turkish colleagues. The oldest of the structures, around 6,500 years older than Stonehenge, are huge circular buildings with large T-shaped stone pillars, up to 16ft (5m) high and weighing 16 tons, many with carvings of snakes, scorpions, foxes, and other animals. Around 45 monoliths have so far been dug out, arranged in circles from 16ft (5m) to 32ft (10m) across. And all this was apparently built by people who knew nothing of pottery, metalwork, or writing. The lack of evidence for any permanent settlement in the area led Schmidt and others to conclude that Göbekli must have been a sacred place where pilgrims travelled to worship, much like the Greek sites of Delphi or Olympia.

However, Banning outlines growing evidence for daily activities at the site, such as flint-knapping and food preparation – suggesting a large population. He has branded it "one of the world's biggest garbage dumps", with piles of animal bones, tools and charcoal. "It is difficult to see where they came from," he said, "unless there were people living here." He disagrees with the idea that the decorative pillars and massive construction efforts mean the buildings could not have been residential. He speculates that the monoliths could have acted as pillars for large communal roofed houses, "similar in some ways to the large plank houses of the Northwest Coast of North America with their impressive house posts and totem poles. If so, they would likely have housed quite large households that might provide an extremely early example of what the French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss called 'house societies'. Such societies often use house structures for competitive display, locations for rituals, and explicit symbols of social units." While Schmidt thinks the site was constructed by hunter-gatherers, Banning believes stone sickles found there suggest the inhabitants were experimenting with agriculture. Schmidt doubts Prof. Banning's theory. "I don't agree with his ideas," he said, "however, I welcome any competing explanations." More specific criticism must await his response in an academic journal.

One great mystery is why Göbekli Tepe was deliberately buried under thousands of tons of soil prior to 8,200 BC. So far, only a fraction of the 20-acre (8ha) area has been excavated.
EB Banning: "So Fair a House: Göbekli Tepe and the Identification of Temples in the Pre-Pottery Neolithic of the Near East" (Current Anthropology, 52:5; Oct 2011); Science Daily, 6 Oct; D.Mail, Times, 19 Oct 2011. For the hypothesis that Göbekli Tepe is the site of the Garden of Eden, see **FT220:46–51**.

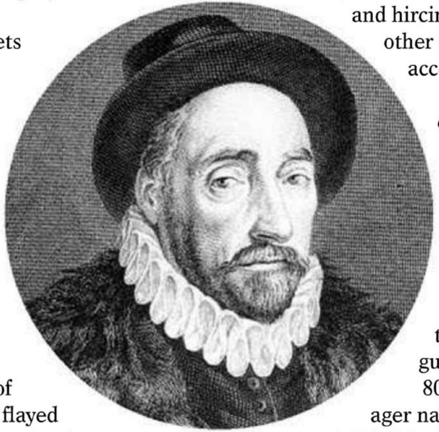
CLASSICAL CORNER

FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

151. I'D CLIMB THE HIGHEST MONTAIGNE

Time for another flit from Greece and Rome to (as it were) more recent ancient history, in this case Michel de Montaigne (1533–1592, below), via a bridge formed by the saturation of his *Essais* with classical quotations and subject-matter, Fort-ified with examples from his own times.

All references and quotations are by page numbers in the authoritative Penguin (1991) translation by Michael A Screech.



GETTY IMAGES / HULTON ARCHIVE

10: Added to Pliny's list of freak deaths (**FT154:18, 247:19**) is Pope Leo X's dropping dead at news of the prayed-for capture of Milan.

45. Montaigne regrets not seeing the books by Joachim of Calabria (d. 1202) and Leo VII, which had predicted the names of all future emperors, patriarchs, and popes – how were they on the 3.30 at Lingfield?

63. "Who has not heard of that woman of Paris who had herself flayed alive merely to acquire a fresh colour from a new skin?"

111. An old bearded celibate who had been a girl until 22, when "his male organs suddenly appeared" as he was planning a jump – how would the IOC rule on this? – "It is not surprising that this sort of thing happens frequently."

115. Augustine's example (*City of God*, bk14 ch24; cf. **FT192:18**) of a man who could fart at will is glossed by the contemporary case of "one who could arrange to fart in tune with verses recited to him" – Farts gratia arses?

123. A girl who lived on spiders, whole peoples on ants, bats, grasshoppers, and lizards – "examples from strange lands, but there is nothing strange about them, if we consider how habit stuns our senses".

124–5: Autoptic accounts of an armless man who could cut food, load and fire a pistol, sew, write, play cards and dice, all with his feet, and of a handless one who by hunching his neck could toss, catch, and wield a sword, also crack a whip "as well as any carter".

248. Kings Clovis and Robert caused by prayer the walls of cities they were besieging to collapse (eat your trumpets, Joshua), phenomena capped by the walls of Arona which were blown up into the air only to fall back into place.

438. An unspecified part of the Spanish Indies where men could only marry after 40, but girls could at 10 – how long these enforced May-September romances lasted Montaigne does not say.

448. On the local village women who bring in nanny-goats as wet nurses when they cannot suckle their babies on breast milk; also how individual infants and hircines recognise each other and will henceforth accept no substitutes.

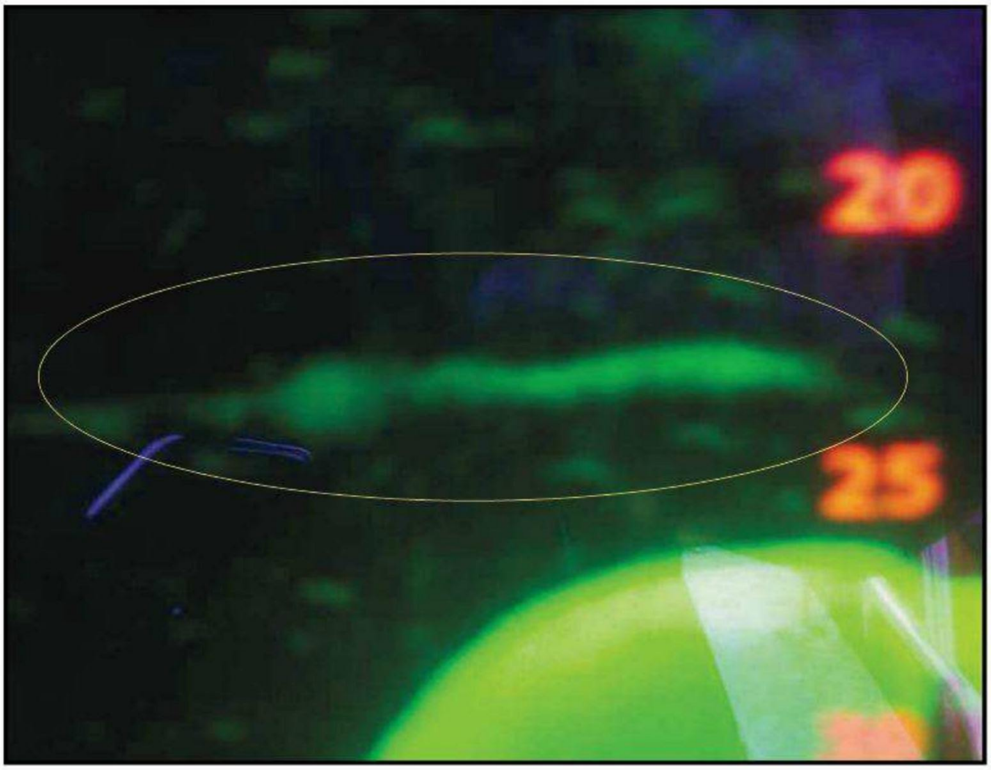
629. Turkish prisoners on a Portuguese ship who incinerated themselves and captors by rubbing nails together until generating a spark which fell into the vessel's store of gunpowder.

800–1, 964–5. A villager nagged for supposed infidelities lopped off his tackle with a sickle and flung them in the wife's face, while a young gentleman who could not rise to a seductive occasion went home, did the same, and sent his severed organs to the disappointed girl as an apology – early self-Bobbittings. At the other end of this erotic scale, an exhausted wife appealed to the Queen of Aragon legally to restrain her husband who "even on days of abstinence" fucked her 10 times a day – the Queen ruled that six would be a decent maximum. Then there was the self-styled Henry Miller of his day who claimed 20 shags a night, his claim derided as a boast to conceal his impotence.

806. Eyewitness account of a monstrous child exhibited by its family at travelling freak shows, a ghastly description (happily too long to cite) of deformed Siamese twins, postluded by the case of "a shepherd of Médoc, about 30 years old, no sign of any genitals, having three holes through which he constantly makes water. He wears a beard and enjoys the touch of women" – in reverse of modern vulgarism, the ladies may be said to have had their holes.

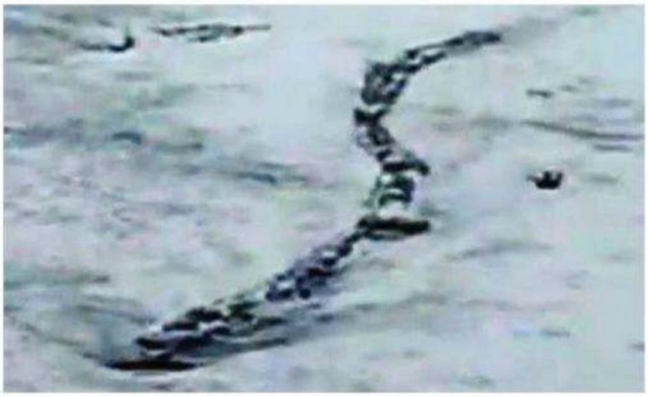
Water monsters

Echoes of Nessie plus an Icelandic aquatic serpent



BNPS

ABOVE: The sonar image of Loch Ness taken by tourist boat skipper Marcus Atkinson, with the purported Nessie echo circled in yellow. **BELOW:** This screengrab from a video taken in the glacial Icelandic Jökulsa river was claimed to be a picture of the legendary Lagarfljót, but others dismiss it as a piece of old fishing net.



SONAR PICTURE OF NESSIE?

Marcus Atkinson, the skipper of a tourist boat on Loch Ness, has won first prize in the Best Nessie Sighting of The Year Award run by bookmakers William Hill with a grainy sonar image resembling a 'serpent-like creature' in the Loch's Urquhart Bay. It was nearly 5ft (1.5m) wide, and 75ft (23m) down in the murky water of the loch. The image appears to show a long object that had followed the boat for more than two minutes. The horizontal mass is not an indicator of length, but excited Nessie watchers assert it is not a fish, seal or wood debris and believe it is an unknown creature.

"I was dropping customers at Urquhart Castle and then got my boat out of the way of the other tour companies," said Mr Atkinson, 43, from Fort Augustus in the Scottish Highlands. "I moved out into the water and looked at the sonar and saw this image. The device takes a reading of the depth and what is below the boat every quarter of a second and gradually builds up a picture, so it covered a time of about five minutes. The object got bigger and bigger and I thought 'bloody hell' and took a picture with my mobile phone. There is nothing that big in the Loch. I was in shock as it looked like a big serpent, it's amazing. You can't fake a sonar image. I have never seen anything returned like this on the fish-finder. It is a bizarre shape to me. I have shown it to other experienced skippers and none of us know what it was. I have seen a lot of pictures in 21 years of being here but this is the clearest image yet. Undoubtedly, there is something in the loch."

> **"I was in shock as it looked like a big serpent, it's amazing"**

Nessie hunter Steve Feltham, 49, said: "There are no animals in the loch as big as the image here. The biggest thing we see are seals, which are nothing compared to this. It's also totally unexplained and can't possibly be fish because in water 75ft down you just wouldn't find them.

"It's very exciting and the best evidence we have had in donkey's years. There is usually a mundane explanation, yet no one has come up with one for this. It's images like this that will keep me going with my hunt for the next 20 years."

However, Dr Simon Boxall from the National Oceanography Centre in Southampton said: "The picture is built up slowly as the boat moves, so it's not a snapshot and thus the image is not an image of a single object unless it is very still. The image shows a bloom of algæ and zooplankton that would exist on what would be a thermocline [the boundary layer between areas of different temperature in bodies of water]. Zooplankton live off the algæ and reflect sound signals from echo-sounders and fish-finders very well. They will appear as a linear 'blob' on the screen, just like this. This is a monster made of millions of tiny animals and plants and represents the bulk of life in the Loch."

Cryptozoologist Loren Coleman points out that this year "Cruise Loch Ness" are running special monster-hunting trips with underwater cameras on the boat skippered by Marcus Atkinson – which could suggest that the whole thing is a publicity stunt. *D.Mail, D.Mirror, Sun, 20 April; cryptomondo.com, 22 April 2012.*

ICELANDIC WORM

Video footage claiming to show a gigantic aquatic serpent was filmed slithering along Iceland's glacial Jökulsa river in the Fljótsdal valley in early February by Hjortur Kjerulf and posted online by the Icelandic national broadcaster, RÚV. Many viewers heralded it as proof of the legendary Lagarfljót, a wormlike monster first mentioned in 1345, and allegedly sighted many times since, for instance in 1963 by the head of the Icelandic National Forest Service, Sigurthur Blöndal, and in 1998 by a teacher and students at Hallormsstathir School. Sightings were considered to portend a great event such as a natural disaster.

According to the folk tradition recorded by Jón Árnason, the Lagarfljót worm grew out of a small lingworm or heath-dragon. A girl was given a gold ring by her mother and, asking how she might best derive profit from the gold, was told to place it under a lingworm. She did so, and put it in the top of her linen chest for a few days, but then found that the little dragon had grown so large, it had broken open the chest.

Frightened, she threw both lingworm and ring into Lagarfljót lake, where the creature continued to grow and terrorise the countryside, spitting poison and killing people and animals.

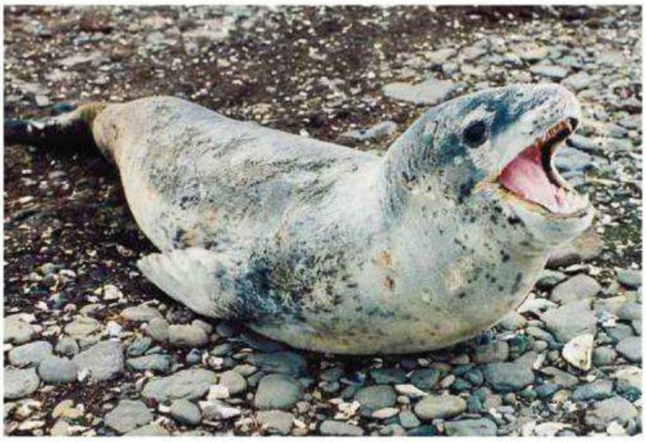
Two Finns called in to destroy it and retrieve the gold ring said that they had managed to tie its head and tail to the bottom of the lake, but it was impossible to kill it because there was a still larger dragon underneath.

Anyway, the short video clip has not won over the sceptics, who claim that the supposed water monster is only a bit of old net, thawing out after becoming frozen in the water. The 'worm' was later demonstrated to be making no progress and therefore probably an inanimate object moved by the rapid current.

"Chasing Monsters in East-Iceland" by Sveinn Birkir Björnsson, Reykjavík Grapevine, 9 May 2008; icelandreview.com, Feb; telegraph.co.uk, 8 Feb; LiveScience.com, 14 Feb 2012.

ALIEN ZOO

KARL SHUKER presents his regular round-up from the cryptozoological garden



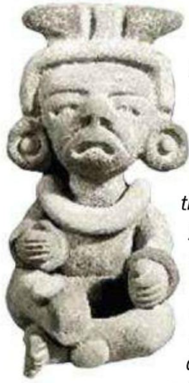
ABOVE: An Antarctic leopard seal. **BELOW:** A Mexican figurine of a tiny man known as an alux. **BOTTOM:** The common raven – does it have a bigger Canadian cousin?

STICKING ITS NECK OUT FOR CRYPTOZOOLOGY?

One of the most popular identities for Nessie and other water monsters is a highly specialised long-necked seal. As yet, however, such a species is entirely hypothetical in the living state (the closest match is the Antarctic leopard seal *Hydrurga leptonyx*), though certain fossil forms are known. However, it now seems that at least one specimen of a *bona fide* modern-day long-necked seal was actually obtained and catalogued. In a recently published list of nine lost scientific treasures, Michael Marshall revealed that the skin of a most extraordinary seal was scientifically described back in 1681 by botanist Nehemiah Grew, within *Musæum Regalis Societatis* – a catalogue of oddities held by the Royal Society in London.

According to Grew's description of this creature: "Wherein he principally differs, is the length of his neck; for, from his nose-end to his fore-feet, and from thence to his tail, are the same measure."

In contrast, the neck length of most known seal species is only half that of their lower body. As is all too often true with cryptozoological specimens, however, this unique skin has long since vanished, and with it any chance of determining its owner's taxonomic identity. *http://bit.ly/A79I0i (New Scientist) 9 Feb 2012.*



A MINI-MAN FROM MEXICO

Here's a hitherto unpublicised crypto-nugget from Mexico. The following eyewitness account, kindly brought to my attention by correspondent Ted Leonard, is excerpted from Sherry Robinson's book *Apache Voices: Their Stories of Survival as Told to Eve Ball* (2000):

"It was up on that high flat mountain where Juh lived that I first saw one of the little people. I thought at first that he was another child about 2 or 3 years old and that he might be lost from his mother but when I got close I saw that he was a grown man, not a child. I told nobody but Daklugie and he explained. There are little people living in the forest and they sometimes come around the outskirts of a rancheria but never inside. They are not ghosts nor witches but just small people who never die. And they mean good to the Apaches."

What makes this sighting of particular interest is that the eyewitness recalling it was none other than Eugene Chihuahua, son of Chief Chihuahua of the Apache Nation in that region, and may well be the only report concerning these Mexican Little People to have been documented from a Native American eyewitness. The mountain referred to by him was a known location called Juh's Stronghold, which is around 40 miles (64km) southwest of Janos, Chihuahua. Mexico is already famous for two other categories of mystery mini-folk – the alux and the kuil kaax – but the entity described here seems different from both of them. *Ted Leonard, pers. comm., 4 Mar 2012.*

ARE GIANT RAVENS SOMETHING TO CROW ABOUT?

And here's another intriguing crypto-claim the New World – specifically Canada this time – recently spotted online and kindly brought to my attention by French correspondent Raphaël Marlière. It may well be mere folklore – then again, it just might be something more. According to the website documenting it, loggers who have worked in the interior of British Columbia assert that there is an isolated, timber-rich valley here that is inhabited by huge ravens, bigger even than golden eagles, but virtually flightless, and further distinguished from normal ravens by their tail plumage, which exhibits a noticeable amount of red pigmentation. Apparently, these mystery mega-crows are very dangerous and opportunistic, not hesitating to wreck a campsite. Lumberjack folklore is renowned in North America for its tall tales of exotic fauna – everything from fur-bearing trout to spiky-furred cactus cats – so this may simply be a less familiar variant. Nevertheless, if anyone out there has any additional information concerning such birds, we at *FT* would love to hear from you! *Raphaël Marlière, pers. comm., 28 Mar 2012; http://www.angelfire.com/bc2/cryptodominion/preybirds.html.*

NECROLOG

We note the passing of a translator, playwright and actor who was a key figure in the 60s poetry scene and a mainstay of *Private Eye*.

GETTY IMAGES / EXPRESS / ALAN MEEK

CHRISTOPHER LOGUE

The radical poet Christopher Logue will be remembered mainly for his translations of Homer, considered by many to be the best of their kind since Alexander Pope. In 1959, Donald Carne-Ross asked him to adapt a sliver of *The Iliad* for the BBC's Third Programme, and he worked intermittently on the epic poem for the rest of his life. With no Greek, he worked from multiple translations and Carne-Ross's word-for-word cribs. Louis MacNeice said of Logue's version that never was blood bloodier or fate more fatal. The violence is visceral, almost pornographic, in detail and has all the drama of an eyewitness account true in spirit to Homer's original:

As he fell back, back arched,
God blew the javelin straight; and thus
Mid-air, the cold bronze apex sank
Between his teeth and tongue, parted his brain,
Pressed on, and stapled him against the upturned hull.

Logue served as a private in the Black Watch from 1944 to 1948, mainly in Palestine. He spent 16 months in Acre Central Prison (a Crusader fortress) and a Scottish jail for a scheme to sell stolen pay books. During his service, he was also blinded in the left eye by a tree branch, which gave him a slightly piratical appearance. Back in London, he had various odd jobs before moving in 1951 to Paris, where he joined Alex Trocchi in editing the magazine *Merlin* and published his first collection of poetry, *Wand and Quadrant* (1953). Maurice Girodias of the Olympia Press commissioned from him a pornographic novel, *Lust*, under the pseudonym Count Palmiro Vicarion.

Returning to London in 1956, Logue wrote plays for the Royal Court Theatre and lyrics for Annie Ross at Peter Cook's Soho club, The Establishment. He was involved with the fusion of poetry and jazz and pioneered the reading of poetry in public, thrilling audiences with his slightly rasping voice. His record from this period, *Red Bird*, is a collectors' item. In 1958, he joined Bertrand Russell's Committee of 100 and went on the first Aldermaston CND march. He was jailed for a month in 1961 for refusing to accept a court order to desist from demonstrating – "a political prisoner in all but name", as he put it. He started to make his poems into posters, and in 1959 earned cult status with *Songs*, his collection of lyrics attacking imperialism and capital punishment. He participated in the celebrated 1965 poetry "happening" at the Albert Hall and, along with Adrian Mitchell, became a leader of the poetry-reading movement associated with the anti-Vietnam War protest.

In 1961, Richard Ingrams invited Logue to contribute to *Private Eye*. He had inherited from his father (a post office wages clerk) an obsession with newspaper clippings, as well as a bulky file of them, and Peter Cook, who greatly admired Logue's "extraordinary talent for being non-commercial", suggested that he edit a column of "True Stories", which ran almost continuously for 30 years. Logue estimated that by the end he had read more than 20,000 reports of forteana and zany behaviour. *Fortean Times* presents a short selection below, illustrating his dry, laconic wit. He also edited *Private Eye*'s "Pseuds' Corner" for a number of years, a job which required "a certain level of hatred for the pretentious idiots of the world". He was a fan of *Fortean Times* and attended our 10th anniversary party. In 1993, "True Stories" was succeeded by the "Funny Old World" column compiled by Victor Lewis-Smith.

One of Logue's poems, *Be Not Too Hard*, was set to music by Donovan, heard in the film *Poor Cow* (1967), and recorded by Joan Baez. Logue appeared as Swinburne in the film of *Dante's Inferno* (1966) and as Cardinal Richelieu in *The Devils* (1970). Both of these were directed by Ken Russell, as was *Savage Messiah* (1972), for which Logue provided the screenplay. His brutally frank autobiography, *Prince Charming*, appeared in 1999. "I'm fickle," he said in 2006. "Almost everything I do is based on other texts. Without plagiarism, there would be no literature. I'm a rewrite man. A complete rewrite man, like our Willy Shakespeare."

As the obituary in *The Economist* said: "He lived on bits and bobs; sponsors, including Paul Getty, kept him going." He won the Whitbread Prize for poetry in 2005 for *Cold Calls* and was appointed CBE in 2007. He is survived by his wife, the writer Rosemary Hill.

John Christopher Logue, poet and actor, born Southsea, Hampshire 23 Nov 1926; died London 2 Dec 2011, aged 85.

UNOFFICIAL RECEIVER

Shortly after visiting her dentist, a housewife of Daytona Beach, Florida, was awakened in the middle of the night by her husband, who complained that her teeth were broadcasting. He was right. Her dentist, Dr John Long, explained that certain metallic fillings can create a receiving set when contacted by acidulous saliva. "It will pass off in a few days," he said. "Meantime, keep your mouth closed as much as you can, for its natural cavity forms an effective baffle box, thereby increasing the volume."

The lady did as she was told and the broadcasts ceased. "I thought I was free of the trouble and ready to throw a party," she said. "But no sooner were things underway than I opened my mouth to laugh and out came the theme song from *Doctor Zhivago*, followed by *Rambling Rose*. Fortunately, our friends are all broadminded. Some of them even danced to the tunes." *Ottawa Journal, 9 April 1970.*

QUICK ANSWER

Because the Reverend Yeomans of Pontesbury found his congregation singing *I Cannot Help But Wonder Where I'm Bound* in a dull, lifeless manner, he decided to liven things up by dancing in the aisle and "showing them how to put across the message in a bouncy way". Hardly had they reached the second verse than Reverend Yeomans, waving his arms above his head with devout enthusiasm, vanished through a faulty grille in the church floor into the central heating system. He got a big laugh. *D.Mail, 12 May 1970.*

DEAF AID

Before the Southend magistrates on a charge of assault, Mr Kenneth Thurlow was delighted to hear his neighbour, Mr Arthur Newland – against whom the assault was alleged – say: "In spite of my being punched, I am grateful to Mr Thurlow. He hit me so hard I could hear again." Mr Newland, aged 61, had been wearing a hearing aid for 20 years. *Essex Chronicle, 11 Sept 1970.*

FOR MORE STRANGE DEATHS GO TO:
www.forteantimes.com/strangedays/strangedeaths

Strange deaths

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL

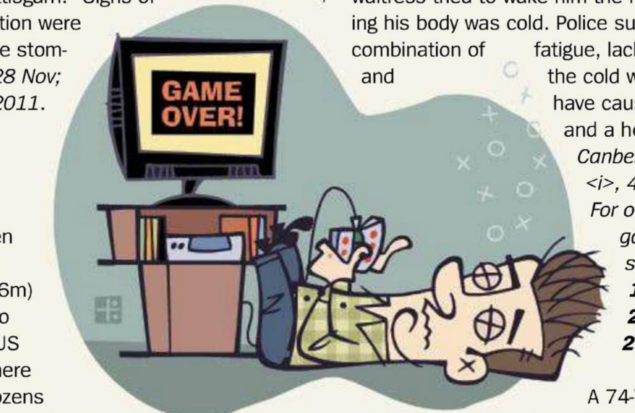
AN INDIAN FARMER DIED AFTER SURGEONS found 13lb (6kg) of metal in his stomach. In nine months, Kamleshwar Singh had eaten 431 coins, 196 iron pellets, 17 bolts and three keys, but his friends and family had no idea. He is believed to have suffered from schizophrenia. "He visited us complaining of intolerable abdominal pain," said a spokesman for the Shreesti Institute of Medical Science in the state of Chhattisgarh. "Signs of chronic ulceration were apparent in the stomach." *Metro, 28 Nov; Sun, 29 Nov 2011*.

RAYMOND Segura Jr, 56, was killed on 15 March when he was buried under a 20ft (6m) mound of pinto beans at the US warehouse where he worked. Dozens of rescue workers at the Kelley Bean Company facility in Brush, Colorado, spent an hour digging him out, but he died before they could reach him. The cause of the accident was under investigation. *telegraph.co.uk, 16 Mar 2012*.

TWO FACTORY WORKERS WERE COOKED TO death after becoming trapped inside an 800°C (1,472°F) industrial oven. The men, aged 56 and 49, tried to tear insulation from the walls and clawed at the door trying to escape. They were cleaning the smelting furnace at Salzburger Aluminium AG, in Lenz, Austria, when the automatic door closed. "We are trying to work out how it ended up being switched on," said a police spokeswoman. *D.Mirror, 10 Mar; Sun, Metro, 12 Mar 2012*.

CHRIS STANIFORTH, 20, FROM SHEFFIELD, died from a pulmonary embolism caused by a blood clot after playing on his X-box console for up to 12 hours at a time. A post mortem examination showed he had deep vein thrombosis, caused by sitting in the same position for long periods, a condition commonly associated with long-haul flights. He had no history of ill health or any underlying medical conditions. *D.Mirror, Sun, 30 July 2011*.

A TAIWANESE MAN DIED AFTER PLAYING A video game in an Internet café for 23 hours. Chen Rong-yu, 23, was playing *League of Legends*, a real-time strategy game similar to the *Warcraft* franchise, in New Taipai City. He was found dead with his hands stretched out towards the keyboard and mouse. Staff said he began playing late on 31 January and had taken frequent sleep breaks, but when a waitress tried to wake him the following evening his body was cold. Police suspected that a combination of fatigue, lack of movement and the cold weather could have caused blood clots and a heart attack. *Canberra Times, <i>, 4 Feb 2012. For other computer gaming deaths see* ***FT172:31, 185:27, 202:27, 233:29***.



TERRY COLON

A 74-YEAR-OLD MAN died after swallowing his dentures during sex with a 62-year-old prostitute in Taiwan. The man, known as Chen, had been living with a close female friend in New Taipei City after separating from his wife many years ago. The prostitute said she had sex with Chen for 30 minutes. He then got up, paid her and was about to put on his clothes when he collapsed. "He fell back onto the bed. His eyes were open but he was not moving although I shook him and tried to wake him up," said the woman, who called the rescue team. Chen was rushed to hospital where he was pronounced dead. Doctors later found his dentures stuck in his throat. *asiaone.com.sg, 2 Feb 2012*.

A PATIENT LEAVING HOSPITAL IN STOCKHOLM, Sweden, after a routine appointment died when he was hit by automatic doors. *Sun, 24 Feb 2012*.

AT THE BEGINNING OF JANUARY, A POLICEMAN was found dead in front of an apartment building in Botosani, Romania, where he lived with his mother. The 26-year-old was lying on the pavement on his stomach. He was drunk and is thought to have drowned in his own urine. *manna.ro (Romania), 10 Jan 2012*.

A BELLY-FULL OF IT!

A shark weighing 457lbs was caught off Antigua. Its stomach contained one pair of two-tone suede beach boots, a human skull and a copy of the Gospel of St John printed on polythene. *Evening News, 15 May 1972*.

FLORA AND FAUNA

When Mr Barnet Kopkin, a dentist of Stoke Newington, had pulled one of Mrs Ruth Abraham's teeth, a centipede uncurled itself from within a tooth and walked around his operating tray. "It may have been there for quite some time," said Mr Kopkin. "Such events are quite unusual, but I once had a patient in whose mouth a tomato seed had begun to grow into a small plant." *Times, 5 Oct 1972*.

BIRD CALLS

"I was watching the news in the sun-lounge when a budgerigar flew in through the window and landed on the indoor aerial," said Miss Mary Tanner of Ware. "I extended my finger to the bird. He hopped onto it and said '443701', which I instantly recognised as his telephonic address. His owners drove over to pick him up later in the day." *Scotsman, 18 May 1977*.

GOD'S LITTLE CREATURE

An unknown man who claimed to be God was knocked down and killed by a heavy tractor in Mt Bruno, Canada. "I was selling flowers at the corner of Naysmith Square," said Mrs Barbara Eastman, "when this man came up and said 'I am God – could you please direct me to the nearest church, please?' When I had given him the proper directions he took off his hat, said 'Thank you', stepped out into the road and was instantly killed by the tractor." A spokesman for the Mounted Police said: "the only distinguishing mark was a tattoo of a fly on the man's left buttock." *Toronto Globe & Mail, 4 Oct 1978*.

ARTURO WHO?

"I did it! I did it!" cried Miss Ida Rubell during her trial for abducting, killing, plucking, cooking and serving with rice to her 96-year-old mother a Panamanian parrot called Arturo. "Arturo was no ordinary bird," said his owner, Mr Robert P Zing. "He spoke three languages, ate scrambled eggs and he had a small but varied repertoire of 19th-century love songs." Mr Zing admitted that eight years ago a dog Miss Rubell claimed as her own had died while in his company. "But it was a very old dog and not at all well-educated." *Milwaukee Journal, 2 Sept 1979*.

WorldMags

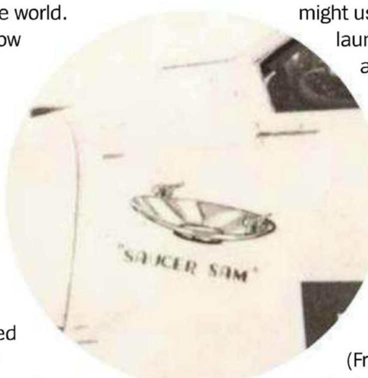
BRITAIN'S X-FILES

19. SAUCER SAM

The age of the flying saucer began in 1947 with Kenneth Arnold's famous sighting, but official concern about the phenomenon reached its peak in 1952 when Winston Churchill famously demanded to know the truth about UFOs. **DAVID CLARKE** reveals a hitherto unknown story from that incredible summer...

What has been called "the year of the UFO" began in the hot summer with a build-up around the US capital. Mysterious radar blips were detected by air traffic controllers at Washington National Airport on two consecutive weekends in July 1952 (**FT265:32–37**). The radar and visual sightings that followed made news headlines across the world. Stories described how fighter jets were scrambled to pursue UFOs over Washington, DC, and it was rumoured orders were issued to shoot them down. Project Bluebook chief Captain Ed Ruppelt later revealed that President Harry Truman called him to ask if the Air Force had an explanation for the UFO flap. The official line was that the phenomenon might have been caused by temperature inversions, but they posed no defence threat (see "Radar Angels" **FT195:36–37**). This was the explanation offered by the Air Force's head of intelligence, Major General John Samford, at a press conference on 29 July that was the best attended since the end of World War II.

It was no surprise that news of the events in Washington reached the in-tray of Britain's 77-year-old Prime Minister. The day before the press conference, Winston Churchill demanded a briefing from his Air Minister, asking, "What's all this stuff about flying saucers?" He was reassured that "a full intelligence study" by the Ministry of Defence had concluded all UFOs were optical illusions, hoaxes and misidentifications of known objects (see **FT164:38–44**). The study, by the MoD's Flying Saucer Working Party, was heavily influenced by information supplied by the CIA, which was keen to clamp down on public interest in UFOs and concerned the Soviet Union might use a fake UFO scare to launch a sneak pre-emptive attack on the West. Churchill was told there was nothing to worry about and, "to judge from recent press statements", the Americans thought the same. This message was underlined by the government's Chief Scientist, Lord Cherwell (Frederick Lindemann), who in a minute to the British Cabinet, dismissed the American saucer scare as "a product of mass psychology".



BELOW: 'Nose art' on the Vampire WR139 flown by Flt Sgt Roland Hughes after his 1952 sighting.

Maybe the Cosmic Joker saw Lord Cherwell's minute and decided to put on a display for the benefit of the British establishment. For, just two days after Churchill drafted his famous minute on 'flying saucers', a flight of RAF jets was intercepted by a mysterious flying object high above West Germany. This sighting would convert one of Churchill's closest colleagues – and a future head of the MoD – into a believer in UFOs.

On 30 July 1952, 22-year-old Flight Sergeant Roland Hughes was flying a de Havilland Vampire FB9 from the former Luftwaffe base at RAF Oldenburg near Bremen for a training exercise in the skies high over West Germany. On completion of the sortie, two pairs of Vampires joined up in battle formation. As they turned to return to base, Flt Sgt Hughes's plane was in number-two position, to the right of the flight leader's aircraft. As he gazed up through the canopy, Hughes caught sight of a "flash of silver light" high above. The light was just a dot at first, but within seconds it raced towards him at fantastic speed until, in the words of his son Brian, "it revealed itself to be a gleaming silver-metallic disc". The young pilot was astounded. As the disc halted its rapid descent, it appeared to level out, leaving it "perfectly matching the flight's speed as it raced along with them".

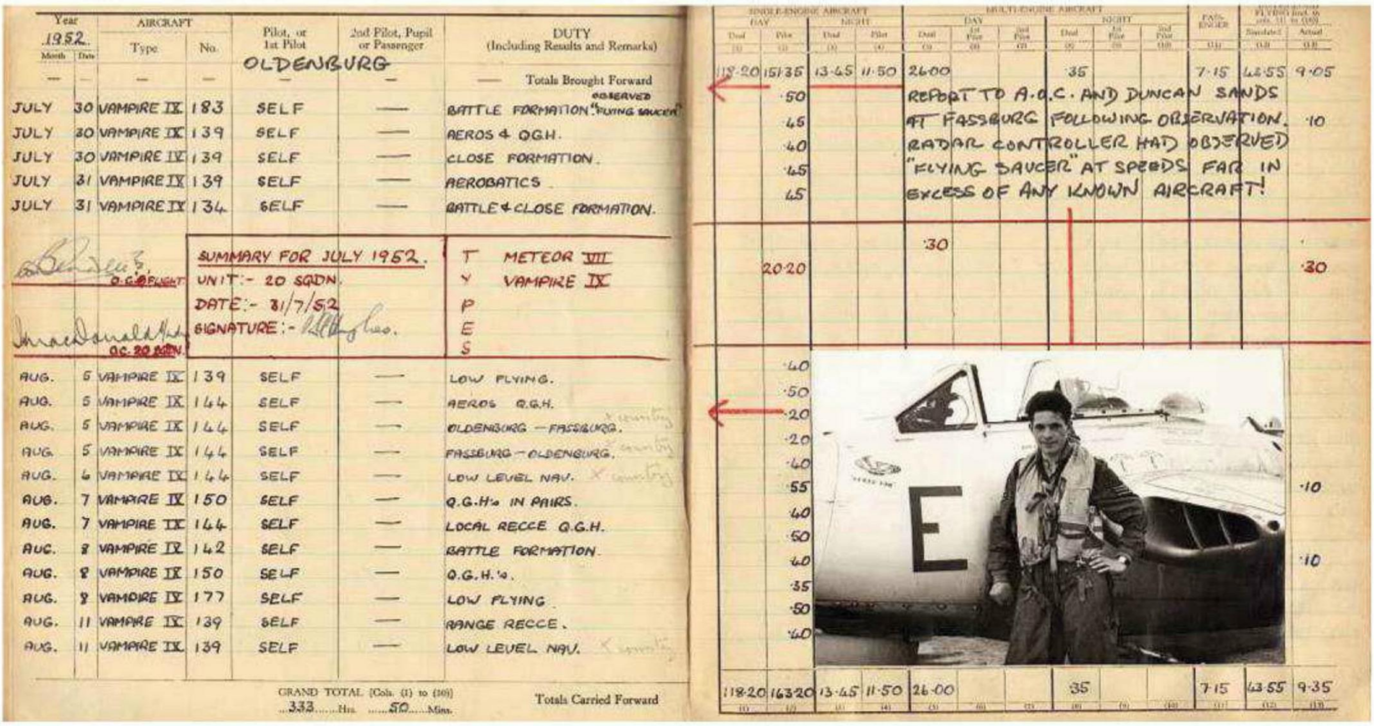
Hughes said he had time to "clearly make out, with astonishing clarity, the disc's highly reflective and absolutely seamless metallic-looking surface". And then, just as rapidly as it had appeared, it raced away in the opposite direction and vanished.

Decades after his retirement from the RAF, Hughes confided this story to his son. He said the disc appeared to be at least 100ft (30m) in diameter, approximately the wingspan of a wartime Lancaster bomber and three times that of the RAF's latest jet fighters. Hughes was so dumbfounded by the apparition that he did not report it until the formation landed at RAF Oldenburg. On leaving his cockpit he asked the other three pilots, "Did you see that thing? It looked like a flying saucer?" To his dismay, no one else had seen anything unusual.

But word spread, and soon afterwards Hughes was quizzed by the squadron intelligence officer. With Cold War tensions rising along the Iron Curtain, it is likely that air intelligence was concerned about the possible Soviet origin of the UFO. In fact, the report was considered so unusual that on 5 August the young pilot was ordered to fly to RAF Fassberg in Saxony, where he was to report to a senior officer. On arrival in the officer's mess, he was amazed to find a visiting government minister, Duncan Sandys MP, waiting to hear his story. In 1952, Sandys was married to the Prime Minister's eldest daughter Diana Churchill and was Minister of Supply in the Conservative government (he would become Secretary of State for Defence in 1957). After hearing Hughes's story, Sandys asked: "How many beers had you had the night before?" Immediately, a senior officer interjected: "No, they picked it up on radar – travelling at speeds far in excess of any known aircraft."

This was the first Flt Sgt Hughes had heard about a radar observation, but it was immediately obvious to him that some form of investigation had been carried out behind the scenes that had uncovered supporting evidence.

On his return from this adventure, a member of his ground crew obtained permission from the RAF to paint a picture of a 'flying saucer' on the fuselage



Year 1952 Month	Date	Aircraft Type	No.	Pilot, or 1st Pilot	2nd Pilot, Pupil or Passenger	DUTY (Including Results and Remarks)
				OLDENBURG		
—	—	—	—	—	—	— Totals Brought Forward
JULY	30	VAMPIRE IX	183	SELF	—	BATTLE FORMATION. OBSERVED "FLYING SAUCER"
JULY	30	VAMPIRE IX	139	SELF	—	AEROS & Q.G.H.
JULY	30	VAMPIRE IX	139	SELF	—	CLOSE FORMATION.
JULY	31	VAMPIRE IX	139	SELF	—	AEROBATICS.
JULY	31	VAMPIRE IX	134	SELF	—	BATTLE & CLOSE FORMATION.
AUG.	5	VAMPIRE IX	139	SELF	—	LOW FLYING.
AUG.	5	VAMPIRE IX	144	SELF	—	AEROS Q.G.H.
AUG.	5	VAMPIRE IX	144	SELF	—	OLDENBURG – FASSBURG. X country
AUG.	5	VAMPIRE IX	144	SELF	—	FASSBURG – OLDENBURG. X country
AUG.	6	VAMPIRE IX	144	SELF	—	LOW LEVEL NAV. X country
AUG.	7	VAMPIRE IX	150	SELF	—	Q.G.H's IN PAIRS.
AUG.	7	VAMPIRE IX	144	SELF	—	LOCAL RECCE Q.G.H.
AUG.	8	VAMPIRE IX	142	SELF	—	BATTLE FORMATION.
AUG.	8	VAMPIRE IX	150	SELF	—	Q.G.H.'s.
AUG.	8	VAMPIRE IX	177	SELF	—	LOW FLYING.
AUG.	11	VAMPIRE IX	139	SELF	—	RANGE RECCE.
AUG.	11	VAMPIRE IX	139	SELF	—	LOW LEVEL NAV. X country

O.C. 'B' FLIGHT
O.C. 20 SQDN.

SUMMARY FOR JULY 1952.
UNIT:- 20 SQDN.
DATE:- 31/7/52
SIGNATURE:- R.L. Hughes.

TYPES
METEOR VII
VAMPIRE IX

GRAND TOTAL [Cols. (1) to (10)]
333 Hrs. 50 Mins.
Totals Carried Forward

118·20 151·35 13·45 11·50 26·00 ·35 7·15 44·55 9·05
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REPORT TO A.O.C. AND DUNCAN SANDS AT FASSBURG FOLLOWING OBSERVATION. RADAR CONTROLLER HAD OBSERVED "FLYING SAUCER" AT SPEEDS FAR IN EXCESS OF ANY KNOWN AIRCRAFT!

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ABOVE: An excerpt from the flight logbook of Flt Sgt Roland Hughes.

of Vampire WR139, flown by Hughes on that fateful day. As his nickname was 'Sam', the words SAUCER SAM appeared in quotation marks underneath a drawing of a tea saucer sporting two little wings (see photograph opposite). As far as I know, this is unique as the only example of 'flying saucer' nose art on a military aircraft anywhere in the world. Brian Hughes told me: "My father's logbook records that the last time he flew WR139 was on 5 June 1953. He says that she still displayed the SAUCER SAM nose art up to that time."

This extraordinary UFO experience stayed with Roland Hughes for the rest of his life, but he could never understand why the other pilots failed to spot the enormous object that was clear and distinct to him. Before his death in 2009 at the age of 79, he told his son that he wondered "if it [the saucer] had some means of stopping the others from seeing it and only allowed me to see it". Brian Hughes told me this comment "left him speechless" because his father had never done any research into UFOs or shown the slightest interest in the supernatural or science fiction. In fact, the impression that UFOs are actually sentient beings, or have some kind of protective or guardian presence, has been mentioned by other RAF pilots who have reported their UFO experiences to me, often in confidence. Aircrew, both military and civilian, are naturally sensitive about discussing this type of extraordinary experience in public, as they fear such stories could adversely affect their flying careers. Flt Sgt Hughes's account suggests they are actually more frequent – and more bizarre – than even the most dedicated ufologists could have guessed.

"Did you see that thing? It looked like a flying saucer"

The incident also had an unexpected impact upon Duncan Sandys. His flippant comment on meeting Hughes at RAF Fassberg suggests he was at least initially sceptical. But on his return to Britain, he joined an elite group of establishment figures who privately expressed belief in flying saucers. In the early 1950s, this included a member of the Royal family, Earl Mountbatten of Burma, who would later become the Chief of Defence staff. Like Mountbatten, Sandys shared his views on flying saucers only with trusted friends in Whitehall. His papers, held by the Churchill Archive at Cambridge University, reveal he was not impressed by Lord Cherwell's sweeping dismissal of the saucer craze as mass hysteria. In a minute to the Chief Scientist on 12 August 1952, he insisted the evidence for flying saucers was no different to the first reports of the German V2 rockets during 1943, which "all our leading scientists declared to be technically impossible". This was a direct dig at Cherwell, who told Churchill it was "lunacy" to believe the Nazis were capable of producing such a weapon. He was proved wrong when the first V2 rocket struck Chiswick in September 1944, killing three civilians.

Drawing upon his wartime experiences, Sandys told Cherwell of his visit to the RAF in Germany, where he "was told that a pilot of the 2nd Tactical Air Force had a few days previously reported seeing a flying saucer". He continued: "I asked to see the pilot and from what he told me of his experience, I have no doubt at all that he saw a phenomenon similar to that described by numerous observers in the United States." What made his story "more convincing" to the minister was the evidence from the radar station. According to Sandys, "[O]ne of the RAF stations in that area quite independently observed an object moving at very great speed and at a very great height at approximately the same time as it was observed by the pilot."

No record survives of the subsequent meeting between Sandys and Cherwell that followed this exchange. But from September a further series of saucer sightings occurred during Exercise Mainbrace, an operation involving NATO air and naval forces simulating a Soviet attack on Western Europe. The most impressive report came from a group of Shackleton pilots who observed a classic 'flying saucer' following a Meteor jet as it approached RAF Topcliffe in North Yorkshire. In his 1956 memoirs, Project Bluebook's head, Captain Ruppelt, wrote that it was these sightings that "caused the RAF to officially recognise the UFO". One of the officials who recalled these heady days was Ralph Noyes, who at the time was Private Secretary to the Vice Chief of the Air Staff. Ralph told me in a 1988 interview that he recalled the top brass's "embarrassed unease, widely shared by the RAF operations staff, that 'our own people' had begun to fall for 'that saucer nonsense'". The age of the UFO had well and truly begun… FT

The second edition of David Clarke's book for The National Archives, *The UFO Files: the inside story of real-life sightings* is published by Bloomsbury later this year.

Author biography

DAVID CLARKE teaches a course in supernatural belief at the Centre for English Cultural Beliefs at Sheffield University. He is a frequent *FT* contributor and columnist .

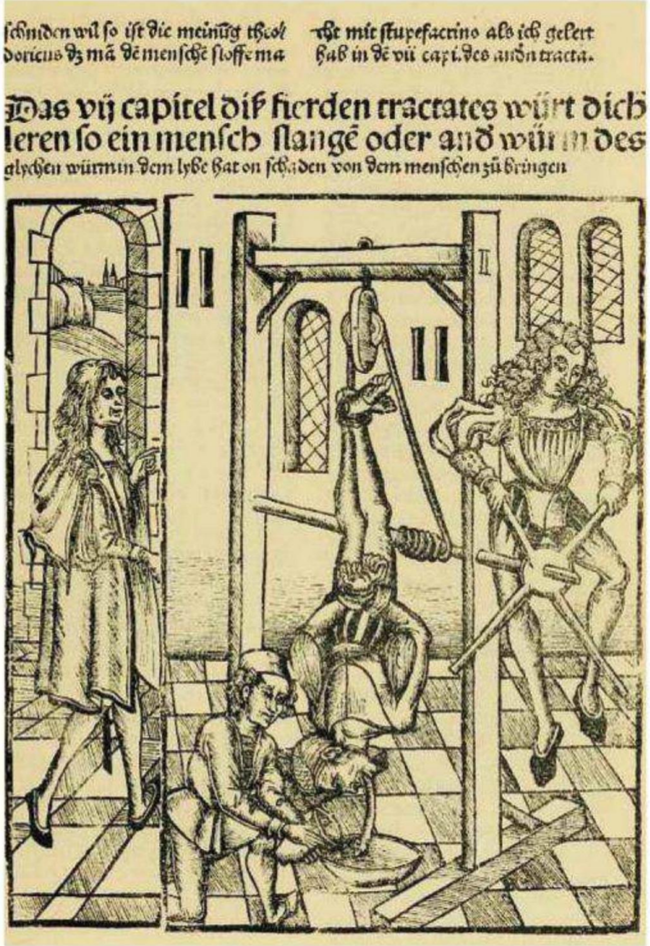
BLASTS FROM THE PAST

FORTEAN TIMES BRINGS YOU THE NEWS THAT TIME FORGOT

39

SNAKES IN THE STOMACH

PETER HASSALL asks: What's worse than snakes on a plane? Snakes in a stomach, of course.



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LEFT: A woodcut from Hieronymous Brunschwig's *Cirurgia* (1497) shows a serpent-like creature being lured from an upended patient with a bowl of milk.

> Miss Morgan admitted that, "while in the woods she had frequently lain down to drink from a brook, and it is believed that in this way the reptile slipped down her throat".

There was once a common folk belief that it could be dangerous to drink water from a stream or river as snake eggs, or even a tiny baby snake, might be swallowed and grow inside the drinker's stomach over time. Sometimes, a small snake would be accidentally swallowed if a person slept outside with their mouth open or ate a handful of berries too quickly. Snakes are traditionally supposed to be fond of milk. This could be useful.

"This fondness is sometimes exploited to trick the snake out of the victim's body. The effect of the trick is reinforced by getting the patient to eat a huge meal… The food is usually strong tasting, strong smelling, and/or salty – bacon is the prime favourite, but salt beef, salt herring, and toasted cheese are also often mentioned… This is a surprisingly old idea. A woodcut from Hieronymous Brunschwig's *Cirurgia* of 1497 shows a serpentine creature being extracted from a patient by suspending him upside down on a sort of pulley over a bowl of milk."[1]

There are many instances of involuntary snake ingestion reported in historical newspapers. In 1895, Bessie Morgan of Susquehanna, Pennsylvania, complained of stomach pains after a day spent berry-picking. Over a period of time, she grew thin, and finally the family's doctor said she must fast for three days.

"At the end of the time specified, the young girl told the doctor that the pain had increased and she suffered from a choking sensation. The doctor required her to open her mouth, while he slapped her violently on the back. She commenced to choke and then the doctor forced a pair of pincers into her throat, and drew forth a snake of the garter species that measured nearly six inches [15cm] in length."[2]

Miss Morgan admitted that, "while in the woods she had frequently lain down to drink from a brook, and it is believed that in this way the reptile slipped down her throat".[3]

Three years later, a Dr J McCarley planned to operate on one Susie Rucker. She had suffered stomach pain for a long time and he suspected appendicitis. Then, events took an unexpected turn.

"Miss Rucker's slumbers were disturbed at three o'clock by a violent twitching in her stomach. She screamed and awakened the household. She hurriedly informed them that something was about to happen. Dr McCarley was sent for in haste, and while awaiting his arrival the family sat around the young girl's bedside in surprise and fear. 'I'm sorter seasick, mother,' Susie said faintly; 'would you all mind giving me a little room.' The family circle was widened. Finally Suzie was sitting bolt upright in bed and four wriggling snakes were upon the floor. Each was about four inches [10cm] in length, and seemed just as glad to gain liberty as Suzie was relieved to give it to them… Dr McCarley arrived… he was of the opinion that Miss Suzie had been drinking slough water all winter and had unconsciously swallowed a nest of snake eggs. The patient says she is now feeling in her old-time health, and that she is going to keep the snakes as a souvenir of the queerest illness she ever experienced."[4]

There are even examples from the 20th century, some from recent years – although these most recent examples are particularly dubious in nature.

In 1902, a 20in (50cm) snake emerged from the mouth of a four-year-old whose appetite had increased even though the child grew thinner and thinner. "The serpent was killed and sent to the University of Strasbourg, and since then the little one has enjoyed excellent health. It is supposed that the child swallowed the serpent while drinking some impure water."[5]

In 1909, a 7in (18cm) snake with a diameter of one inch (2.5cm) was removed from Mrs Kate Fellman by Dr LL Cope.

"'For eight years,' said Mrs Fellman, 'I have been suffering excruciating pain, and had no idea what the cause was. I was always hungry, and I ate five or six times a day.'… Dr Cope says it is one of the most peculiar cases he has ever experienced. He says the reptile ate nearly all the food that entered Mrs Fellman's stomach and did not disturb the organs in any way. He says it is marvellous how she withstood this loss of nutrition."[6]

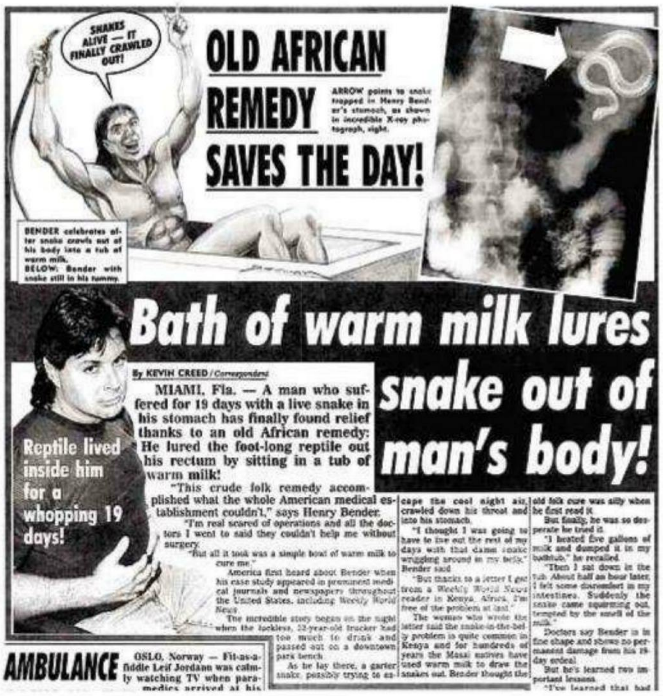
Equally marvellous is how the snake managed to survive the strong digestive juices inside her stomach. Perhaps stretching the bounds of probability, the article also stated that several years earlier her husband died after a similar operation when a 5in (13cm) snake had been removed from his stomach.

In 1930, a 55-year-old French woman was reported to have lived with a snake inside her for years. A doctor clearly saw the 30in (76cm) long intruder in her stomach in an X-ray picture.[7]

Jan Harold Brunvand, the prominent American folklorist and collector of urban legends, is sceptical of modern "bosom serpent" stories and has suggested they are usually newspaper hoaxes intended to liven up slow news weeks.[8]

It is also possible that some cases are hoaxes perpetrated by the alleged human hosts. The newspaper description of the appearance of the four snakes in the 1898 Susie Rucker case is odd. It reads as if she distracted her family and produced some previously hidden snakes. Perhaps she was seeking attention by faking an illness or needed to produce a reason to avoid the threatened operation.

Other cases may be more than hoaxes, but less than true. The devil is in the detail. Gillian Bennett, another folklorist, has collected more than 120 examples of amphibian and reptile body contamination. "The creatures are usually said to be toads, frogs, newts, snakes and serpents, lizards or 'worms', and the organs where they have taken up residence are chiefly said to be the stomach or intestines," she writes.[9]


SNAKES ALIVE — IT FINALLY CRAWLED OUT!

OLD AFRICAN REMEDY SAVES THE DAY!

ARROW points to snake trapped in Henry Bender's stomach, as shown in incredible X-ray photograph, right.

BENDER celebrates after snake crawls out of his body into a tub of warm milk.
BELOW: Bender with snake still in his tummy.

Bath of warm milk lures snake out of man's body!

Reptile lived inside him for a whopping 19 days!

By KEVIN CREED / Correspondent

MIAMI, Fla. — A man who suffered for 19 days with a live snake in his stomach has finally found relief thanks to an old African remedy: He lured the foot-long reptile out his rectum by sitting in a tub of warm milk!

"This crude folk remedy accomplished what the whole American medical establishment couldn't," says Henry Bender.

"I'm real scared of operations and all the doctors I went to said they couldn't help me without surgery.

"But all it took was a simple bowl of warm milk to cure me."

America first heard about Bender when his case study appeared in prominent medical journals and newspapers throughout the United States, including Weekly World News.

The incredible story began on the night when the luckless, 32-year-old trucker had too much to drink and passed out on a downtown park bench.

As he lay there, a garter snake, possibly trying to escape the cool night air, crawled down his throat and into his stomach.

"I thought I was going to have to live out the rest of my days with that damn snake wriggling around in my belly," Bender said.

"But thanks to a letter I got from a Weekly World News reader in Kenya, Africa, I'm free of the problem at last."

The woman who wrote the letter said the snake-in-the-belly problem is quite common in Kenya and for hundreds of years the Masai natives have used warm milk to draw the snakes out. Bender thought the old folk cure was silly when he first read it.

But finally, he was so desperate he tried it.

"I heated five gallons of milk and dumped it in my bathtub," he recalled.

"Then I sat down in the tub. About half an hour later, I felt some discomfort in my intestines. Suddenly the snake came squirming out, tempted by the smell of the milk."

Doctors say Bender is in fine shape and shows no permanent damage from his 19-day ordeal.

But he's learned two important lessons.

"I've learned that bad

AMBULANCE

OSLO, Norway — Fit-as-a-fiddle Leif Jordann was calmly watching TV when paramedics arrived at his

LEFT: A report from the *Weekly World News* on 21 Feb 1999 related that Henry Bender, a 32-year-old trucker from Miami, Florida, had fallen asleep after an evening's drinking, and a garter snake had crawled down his throat and into his stomach. After the *WWN* had reported his sad tale, a reader in Kenya had recommended a Masai folk remedy – immersing himself in a bath of warm milk. At first Mr Bender scoffed at the notion but, after 19 days of suffering the snake's presence, he successfully tried the ancient cure.

Not all alleged internal snakes are actually in the stomach. Also, many may not even be snakes.

A modern newspaper article about more than 1,000 journals from Royal Navy medical officers, made accessible after a lengthy cataloguing project at the Kew National Archives, mentioned an interesting case. In June 1825, Ellen McCarthy, a 12-year-old passenger on board the *Elizabeth*, taking emigrants from Ireland to Canada, fell ill. The ship's doctor recorded that she vomited up three worms – one an astonishing 220cm (7ft 3in) long. His notes stated: "Complained yesterday evening of pain in the bottom of the belly increased on pressure, abdomen hard and swollen, picks her nose, starts in her sleep, bowels constipated, pyrexia, tongue foul, pulse quick, skin hot, great thirst. Her mother brought me a *lumbricus* [worm] this morning 87in long which the patient vomited."[10]

By 1864, Mrs CW Mercer had suffered stomach upsets for four years. She felt "a tickling and uneasy sensation about the pit of the stomach. The same sensation has continued to increase in severity from that time. A few months since it became the incontrovertible opinion of the most skilful physicians, that the increasing difficulty has been the growth of a snake in the stomach. It has grown so large now that it distends the stomach so as to produce a bunch upon the outside as large as a quart bowl. Upon pressing this bunch with the hand, the reptile recoils and produces great distress in the stomach. When fish or meat is being cooked in the room, if the snake is not satisfied with food, it rises up in the throat producing strangulation. When desiring food it manifests it by rising up in the throat."[11]

Dr Peter Darben commented that: "snakes in the stomach are often attributed to infection by the large human roundworm *Ascaris lumbricoides* which can migrate up the œsophagus and block the airways. However, this part of the description seems to closely resemble a hernia letting some of the intestine protrude under the skin."[12]

Dr Darben gave me further details, saying: "I don't pretend to be an expert on hernias, however the description does seem to be similar to one, albeit one in an unusual place. My knowledge of hernias is that they normally poke through pre-existing weak spots or holes, for instance the inguinal hernias."[13]

Astonishingly, *A.lumbricoides* "infects over 20 per cent of the world's population… mostly in tropical and subtropical regions. Adults live in the small intestine, with males reaching 30cm [12in] in length and females 40cm [15¾in] and about as thick as a pencil. Unlike the smaller hookworms and whipworms, *Ascaris* does not feed on its host's tissue, but rather feeds on the contents of the intestines… They can certainly pass through the pyloric sphincter from the small intestine into the stomach. They probably couldn't survive there for long as the stomach acid would be a touch harsh and there wouldn't be the right sort of food, however I can't give you a firm time span. They definitely pass through the stomach when they're wandering places they shouldn't and vomiting these worms up is a not infrequent occurrence in heavy infestations."[14]

Between misidentified tapeworms and the odd misdiagnosed hernia, it appears the stomach snake cases that are not hoaxes can be explained.

The interesting point is that the descriptions are reasonably accurate – it is the interpretations that are wrong.

Notes

[1] Gillian Bennett: *Bodies: Sex, Violence, Disease, and Death in Contemporary Legend*, University Press of Mississippi, 2005, p27.

[2] "Snake in Her Stomach", *Auckland Star*, New Zealand, 29 Aug 1896, p3 (quoting from the *New York Journal*).

[3] *Ibid*.

[4] "Coughs Up Four Snakes – East St. Louis Woman Convinces a Doctor She Did Not have Appendicitis", *Dubuque Daily Herald*, Iowa, 3 June 1898, p6.

[5] "Serpent In A Child's Stomach", *Auckland Star*, 11 Oct 1902, p2.

[6] "Swallowed Reptile With Drink Of Water in Virginia", *New Oxford Item*, Pennsylvania, 28 Jan 1909, p1.

[7] "Woman Swallows A Snake", *Morning Bulletin*, Rockhampton, Queensland, Australia, 10 June 1930, p6 (from an unnamed journal in Upper Savoy, according to the Geneva correspondent of the *Daily Mail*).

[8] Jan Harold Brunvand: *Curses! Broiled Again! The Hottest Urban Legends Going*, WW Norton & Company, New York, 1990, pp82–84.

[9] Bennett, *op. cit.*, p6.

[10] "Girl vomited two-metre parasitic worm, archives reveal", *Guardian*, 30 Sept 2010, online at http://bit.ly/aVlQdp (guardian.co.uk).

[11] "Snake In A Woman's Stomach", *New York Times*, 10 July 1864, (quoting the *Lockport Journal*), online at http://nyti.ms/9H3gS2 (nytimes.com).

[12] Peter Darben, posted to the Yahoo! forteana group, 7 May 2010.

[13] Peter Darben, *pers. comm.*

[14] Peter Darben, *pers. comm.*

THE TRAIL OF THE NIGHT WALKER

RICHARD STANLEY returned to his South African roots, only to find that the folklore of his childhood had come to life in the form of a shape-shifting monster terrorising the small town of Steytlerville.

NATHALIE BARDIN

ABOVE: The landscape of the Great Karoo, home to black magicians and demonic creatures.

THE KAROO: SUMMER 2011

"When I first caught sight of him through my binoculars, he was standing right there – next to that bush."

Hannes November indicated a scrubby stand of cactus on the far side of the road that ran along the base of the koppie. It was barely a smudge in the moonlight, hardly the sort of hiding place one might expect for a mythical demon that I had been tracking since childhood.

"What did he look like?"

"He was wearing a long white coat and black trousers. He stood still with both hands behind his back whenever cars or people approached. Then he picked up a white sack and took blankets over to the bushes as if he was trying to make a bed."

"And how did you know he wasn't just an ordinary man? A vagrant looking for someplace to sleep."

Hannes gave me a silent, long-suffering look and for a moment I thought my question was too impertinent to warrant an answer.

"Because he didn't belong there. What he was doing didn't make any sense."

"What do you mean? What didn't make sense?"

"He turned into a dog."

"You saw him turn into a dog?"

Hannes nodded slowly. Then he fell silent, shifting from foot to foot as he nervously fingered his harpoon, a double-bladed implement fashioned from sharpened sheep shears that he had devised in order to hunt the shape-shifter he insisted had been prowling the settlement.

NICHOLE SHAFER

THE NAGLOPER

Reports of a marauding xenomorph had been coming in from folk in Steytlerville and the neighbouring towns of Klipplaat and Willowmore for some months (see **FT277:10, 286:53**). No one seemed to be able to agree on exactly what the creature looked like, other than that it was something that "didn't belong" in any sane or normal world.

"I first saw him on my way home," volunteered Hannes's buddy, Luzuko. "He only looked like a dog from a distance. Up close it looked like something I had never seen before. It was so fucking lelik [dark], I hit him with my beer bottle."

"Then what happened?"

"I chased after him but he grew wings and flew away!"

"UP CLOSE IT LOOKED LIKE SOMETHING I HAD NEVER SEEN BEFORE"

Normally I would have dismissed such reports as the obvious side effects of delirium tremens, but I had heard tell of these shape-shifters before and their ways were not unfamiliar to me. Indeed, accounts of this wandering demonic entity, commonly known as the *Nagloper* or Night Walker, are so commonplace in southern Africa's arid hinterland, in the tiny one-horse towns scattered throughout the vastness of the Great Karoo, the Namib and the Kalahari, that I had based my second feature film *Dust Devil* (1992) on similar tales I had heard as a youth. In many respects, this unruly body of mythology runs a close parallel to the European vampire tradition. The Night Walkers are said to be of either gender, roaming the veldt in the company of baboons and owls and often gathering at appointed spots like witches meeting at a coven. Their bond with their familiars is so complete that they are believed to betray themselves by coming to the rescue of these totemic animals when they are threatened by hunters. Sometimes, in remoter areas, lookouts have to be posted at the graves of the newly buried in order to prevent Night Walkers or black magicians (the two being virtually indistinguishable) from extracting parts of the cadavers for their loathsome rituals. They are said to strip themselves of all clothing and adorn their heads with human finger or toe bones before entering the huts of their prey, walking backwards so their footprints appear to point away from their destination. Some believe that the Night Walkers' shadows can detach themselves and move at a distance from their owners, an attribute reminiscent of both the *Berbelangs* of the Philippines and the problems Western vampires are said to encounter with their reflections or, more recently, with showing up on either film or videotape. The Bantu believe it is dangerous at the best of times to stand in anyone's shadow as the person's body might contain some magic 'medicine', which could be harmful. Because of this, many believe it is best to rise before the Sun has time to cast a shadow. In this way, one can rid oneself of anything harmful 'picked up' the previous evening which might be transmitted to others if one rose only after the Sun was already high.

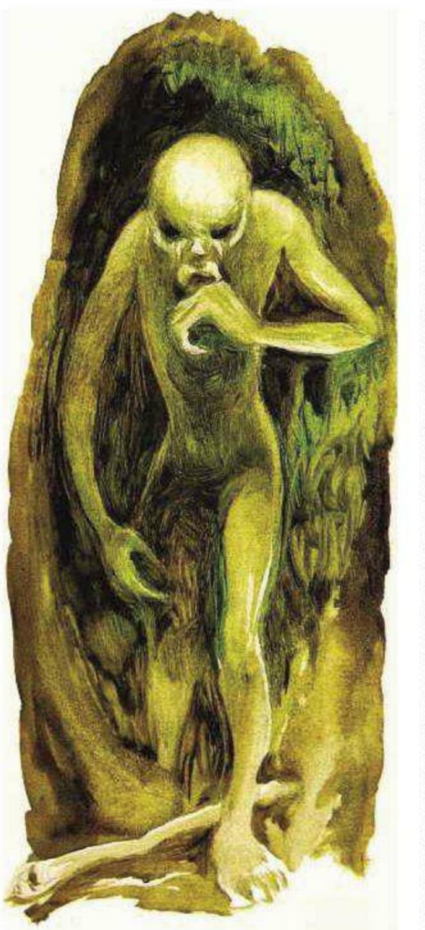
WorldMags

RICHARD STANLEY

ABOVE: Magic, South African style; a still from Richard Stanley's 1993 film *Dust Devil*, which drew on the mythology of the Night Walker. **BELOW:** The Night Walker steps across the magic kerrie; an illustration by Penny Miller, the author's mother.

When a Night Walker crosses the threshold of a hut, all of its occupants – even the dogs – are supposed to fall into a death-like stupor, similar to the trance state said to be induced by the European vampire, thus enabling the parasitic beings to fatten on the life force of their victims without fear of interruption. According to *Myths and Legends of Southern Africa* (Books of Africa, 1979), an encyclopædic tome written by my mother, the artist and anthropologist Penny Miller: "Small children are supposed to be especially attractive to these ghouls, and many became infected with foul diseases. Adults, too, do not escape their attentions. The women Night Walkers have their way with the men of the hut, and their male counterparts pay their vile court to the ladies. The sleepers only become aware of this the next morning when they awaken feeling weak and powerless in body and limb. Many a 'morning after the night before' must have been blamed on a convenient Night Walker!"

It is entirely possible that widespread belief in this malign spirit might be a consequence of the commonplace but nonetheless terrifying condition known as the 'old hag' or 'sleep paralysis', a disorder strongly associated with narcolepsy, catoplexy and the hypnogogic hallucinations thought to have inspired the incubi and succubi of European mythology (see **FT163:42–46**). It is perhaps no accident that reports of the Night Walker and the numerous phantom hitchhikers that haunt the back roads of southern Africa, Australia, Texas, Utah and New Mexico, flagging down late-night travellers only to vanish without trace from their passenger seats, seem to come from areas where the landscape is unusually flat and monotonous, as if the sheer uniformity of the terrain is enough to lull the unwary motorists into 'highway hypnosis', a liminal state between sleep and waking in which we are somehow more vulnerable to these unbidden incursions from the beyond.



PENNY MILLER

The Bantu traditional healers, known as *sangomas*, commonly believe that these unwanted visitors can only be warded off by making small cuts in one's skin into which magic *muti* or medicine is rubbed. This is supposed to create such an itching and burning when the Night Walker approaches that the sleeper is bound to awaken before he can be molested. It is also thought that a Night Walker can be halted or even destroyed by the use of a magic *kerrie*, a carved wooden baton analogous to the sharpened stake favoured by Western vampire-hunters. If the Night Walker can be tricked into stepping across the *kerrie*, which in times gone by was often left lying across the doorways of huts as a form of protection, the restless spirit can be rooted to the spot and stripped of its power in the same manner that a lightning conductor is used to earth static electricity and draw the teeth from a storm. According to my mother: "…the kerrie will 'hold' him fast until sunrise the next morning. The first to speak to the intruder should be the head of the kraal, who must be immediately summoned, and this will free the Night Walker. The punishment is then decided on, and usually painfully carried out…"

My mother's tales of old Africa fascinated me as a child and cast a long shadow over my adult life. It wasn't so much the terrifying content of her bedtime fables as the sincerity with which she related them. Many of these yarns were drawn from oral tradition, 'friend of a friend' stories whose folkloric outlines would be instantly familiar to any frequent reader of these hallowed pages; but *some* of the things she repeated were, she insisted, based on direct personal experience. She claimed to have seen the witch doctor's familiars first hand, the dreaded *chitukwane* or 'thin child' made from the mutilated body of an infant, reanimated by obscure necromantic art and dispatched to perform unspeakable nocturnal errands on behalf of its master or mistress. It was only when I started to go to school that I began to realise that much of what I had taken to be facts of life during my early years in the remoter parts of the subcontinent simply didn't exist in the so-called 'real' world.

Perhaps it should have come as little surprise to find on my return to Africa that the faceless beast that had haunted my childhood was still stalking the dustier back roads of the 21st-century Karoo. If the Night Walker was really only a myth, a tale told to terrify hapless infants, then it remains a very powerful one, a legend capable of endlessly reinventing itself and shifting its colours and details to suit the changing times. The last thing I had expected when I set out to attend a retrospective of my work at the Grahamstown arts festival last year was to find myself once more on the trail of the Dust Devil; but despite the chaotic and far-fetched nature of the first hand reports I'd hoovered up on my way across the Eastern Cape, there was no escaping the unpleasant realisation that the good folk of Steytlerville were quite literally living in fear of something they could scarcely describe, let alone comprehend.

Royal Hotel
Tel: 049 835 0385

ABOVE: The Royal Hotel, Steytlerville.
BELOW: Hannes November and family in his 'gaming store'.

THE PEOPLE OF STEYTLERVILLE WERE LIVING IN FEAR OF THE MONSTER

THE STEYTLERVILLE MONSTER

Americans have their Bigfoot and Australians their bunyip, but the South African Nagloper is an altogether more protean being, capable of defying any attempts by folklorists or foolhardy cryptozoologists to contain, categorise or otherwise pigeonhole its hallucinatory characteristics.

Despite sharing this neck of the bush with a thriving population of baboons and other primates, the farmers feel no need to cast this nightmarish beast in the specifically simian form of the sasquatch, the more conventional furry humanoid, skinwalker or yeti commonly reported abroad. While human in at least one of its facets, the Nagloper seems capable of transforming itself at will. Some hold that it may be the victim of a curse or even a resurrected corpse transformed by an evil witchdoctor into a bestial familiar, but all that anyone can agree on is that these beings seem drawn to settlements like Steytlerville, sniffing out their fears, frustrations and unrequited longings from 1,000 miles away just as a shark scents blood.

At face value, Steytlerville is like any other Karoo town, with its dusty high street dominated by a whitewashed church and a central bar/hotel. This sleepy community was founded in 1786 by the Reverend Steytler and now stands at the centre of the Eastern Cape's wool and mohair industry.

To all intents and purposes, the place should serve as a model of secure conservative values and Anglican rectitude, were it not for the fact that the settlement stands at the very edge of Baviaanskloof, the single largest remaining wilderness area on the subcontinent where previously unknown archæological remains and Bushman sacred sites, not to mention whole new species of flora and fauna, are still turning up almost daily.

In the summer of 2011, something else – something unimaginable – crawled out of the African night to invade the town's collective unconscious. The troubles began shortly before Easter, when mourners attending two separate funerals reported seeing an unidentified creature loitering in the windswept churchyard. The frightened community requested an urgent meeting with the police, who were baffled to discover that none of them could agree on an accurate description of the beast. Some

NICHOLE SHAFER

claimed it was a dog, a pig, a cow, a monkey or even a bird or a bat while others insisted it was really a man in a funny-looking suit or coat. The only thing they could be sure of is that they couldn't get a clear look at his face, which seemed smudged or oddly blurred, as if made of ice.

A few days later, a young wool-carder, who gave his name as Nozipho, claimed that he had been on his way to the tavern with one of his co-workers when they had seen a man in a black jacket "behaving strangely". Nozipho approached the man and asked, "What's your problem?" When the stranger didn't reply, he took a step closer, only to realise with mounting horror that the man "had no head". According to the report filed at the local police station, the stranger then turned into a dog that was "very angry" and "as big as a cow". After Nozipho and his friend turned tail and ran, the monster allegedly rounded on another group of people in the same road. According to Warrant Officer Zandisile Nelani the beast then "turned into a monkey" before apparently vanishing into thin air. (See **FT277:10**).

As word of mouth spread, the sightings began rapidly to proliferate and the beleaguered locals found themselves growing too fearful to go near the tavern at night. Worse still, the beast seemed to be growing bolder, as if feeding off their fears. The terrified parishioners even reported having seen the creature brazenly peering through the windows of the church during the pastor's Sunday sermon; but when they ran outside in panic, they could find no sign of it. By late summer, the irrational wave of mass hysteria had spread throughout the town, infecting every tier of the community. It was clear that something had to be done.

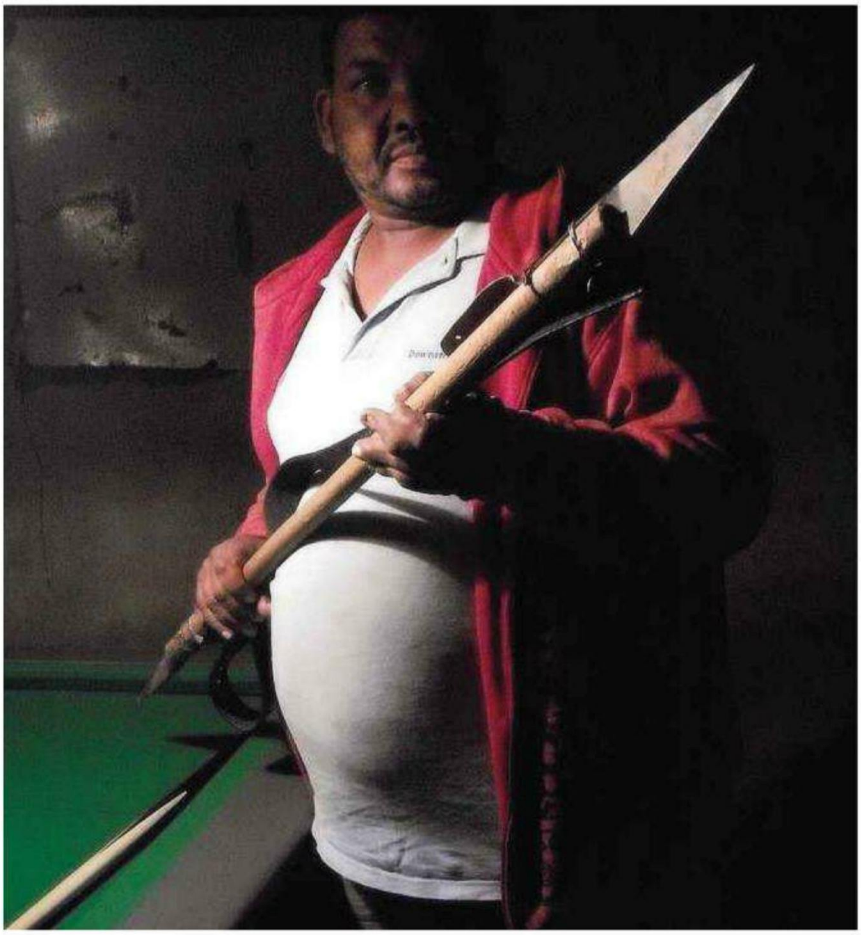
THE SLEEP OF REASON

Hefting his double-edged harpoon like some sort of latter day Ahab, Hannes November started warily down the barren slope towards the stand of cactus. Under normal circumstances, Hannes ran the local 'gaming store' – what amounted to two ratty-looking pool tables and a collection of ageing video machines that occupied one half of the narrow concrete shed he called home. Hannes, like the other denizens of the sorry-looking grey-walled settlement that had sprung up on the outskirts of Steytlerville, was the victim of a peculiar sort of post-liberation apartheid. In a fumbling attempt at land reform, the African National Congress had passed a plethora of new laws ensuring that any family that lived in a particular premises for more than three generations would have a legitimate claim to the property. Fearing a situation similar to the one in Zimbabwe, where a great many white farmers had seen their homesteads confiscated by their farm labourers, the landowners had responded by summarily moving the workers off their properties, shunting them into vast, hastily built settlements such as this one. Accordingly, the labourers were obliged to commute to work by bus, a grinding journey of many dusty miles, while their families were forced to live in a squalor every bit as bad as the conditions experienced by previous generations under apartheid rule.

The sleep of reason had once again given birth to monsters. While the white farmers and townsfolk were well aware of the shape-shifting demon that their Bantu labourers referred to as *Bawokazi* (literally 'father's brother' or 'paternal uncle' – another term for 'big brother' perhaps), it was equally clear that they still felt reasonably secure behind the ramparts of their Dutch Reformed faith, whitewashed picket fences and broad, electrified streets. If the beast existed, then it belonged on the other side of town, in the mean, lightless alleyways of the ramshackle settlement between the freeway and the open desert where the Dust Devil was a living, breathing reality and grown men lay awake in their beds for fear of the nameless emanation from out of the wilds that stalked their dreams and threatened their sanity.

THE BEAST TURNED INTO A MONKEY AND VANISHED INTO THIN AIR...

The owner/manager of the Royal Hotel was a young, white Afrikaner, a classic redneck quietly working on his beer gut. He seemed friendly enough when I first checked in, but he rapidly changed his tune when I casually told him what had brought me to Steytlerville, his expression hardening as he drew back, distaste sparking in his eyes as if he had detected an unpleasant smell in the room. The bespectacled receptionist, who had been chatting happily only moments before, abruptly decided it was time to close up the till and head for home. At first I was concerned that I would have to turn in the keys to my room and spend the night in the car, but at length the manager made his position clear. While declining any comment on the affair for fear that I might somehow try to link his "respectable business" with the recent spate of monster sightings, the increasingly sweaty-looking proprietor did however let slip that one of the guests at the only other hotel in the area, a rival business named the Theatrical Hotel on



ABOVE: Hannes 'Bosvark' November, wielding the harpoon with which he challenged the Night Walker. **FACING PAGE:** The undying shape-shifter in human form, in Richard Stanley's *Dust Devil*.

NICHOLE SHAFER

the outskirts of town, had apparently caught a glimpse of the beast only a few days ago.

The staff at the Theatrical were, if anything, even less helpful. In point of fact, I couldn't even talk my way past the newly installed security gates. They were fully booked and had no intention of taking time out to discuss what their guests might or might not have seen in the desert night beyond their floodlit perimeter fence, let alone of loosening up enough to debate the finer points of cryptozoology with an out-of-towner such as myself.

On the way back, I paused outside the white-walled church, trying to imagine the Night Walker peering in through its faux-gothic windows at the terrified Dutch Reformed congregation. Strangely enough, it wasn't that hard to visualise. There was a dead fox lying in the road, only recently killed by a passing truck, its lips still drawn back in a frozen snarl of defiance. I stopped to move the poor beast's shattered body safely back onto the verge before starting towards the settlement on the far side of the dry river bed that ran between the two sides of Steytlerville: two communities that existed side by side without really touching each other, separated more firmly by race and class than by any mere detail of geography.

It was a posse of bored teenagers milling outside a late-night cafe on the edge of the settlement that gave me my first concrete lead, steering me towards Hannes November's gaming store. They referred to him by his nickname, *Bosvark* or 'bush pig', making fun of his efforts to catch the creature and implying that he was at least a few cards shy of a full deck. When I asked them straight out if they had seen the monster for themselves, they clammed up pretty fast. "It's very dangerous," murmured one of the kids nervously as his peers retreated towards their bicycles.

"Very, very dangerous."

Dust Devils

There was no doubt that Hannes was crazy, of course, at least by any conventional definition of the term; one look in his eyes would tell you that immediately. But I couldn't help asking myself what it was about this stocky, bullet-headed, God-fearing man that had forced him to make a stand against the nameless nemesis he believed had infiltrated and infected his impoverished community. Did the answer lie in Hannes's own outsider status, in his frustrations with the new post-Apartheid order?

Or in the violent video games with which he stocked his threadbare gaming store? Equally unclear was the nature of the threat itself. After all, no one had been directly attacked or physically harmed by the beast. Hannes referred to the fact that some of the local children had to pass by the stand of cactus where he had seen the creature on their way to school, but this justification seemed to be little more than an afterthought. When I asked him what had really driven him to hunt the Dust Devil, all he could tell me was that he had been guided by the power of the Lord – *die Heerde* – to defend his people and way of life.

RICHARD STANLEY

"Two of my friends came with me. We got to within 25 metres [80ft] of the monster," said Hannes, slowing as we warily approached the scene of his previous encounter with the beast.

"Did you challenge it or try to communicate with it?"

"That's when I took my spear and told it *'Jy for my, ek vir jou'*!"(literally "You for me, me for you"' – a challenge to one-on-one combat).

Hannes gestured fiercely at the cactus with his harpoon, speaking the words by rote as if he were recounting something seen in a movie. I surmised that he had told the story so many times to his family, friends, police and local journalists that it had already lost any sense of objective reality to him.

"And that's when you saw him turn into a dog?"

He nodded again. "It was a black dog with white legs. But it didn't bark. It didn't make a sound."

"Then he ran away. And all the lights in the houses went out as he passed," added Luzuko, making a sweeping motion with his hand. Behind him, Hannes began to poke at an old sack lying at the base of the cactus, cautiously lifting it with the tip of his harpoon. "That's what he was using to try and make a bed."

I glanced at the sack. I think Hannes wanted me to photograph it or possibly even take a hair sample, but quite frankly there didn't seem to be any point. There was something faintly pathetic about the idea of this immortal demon searching for nothing more than a quiet place to lay its head and get some rest.

"Do you think he's still around some place?"

Hannes looked past me for a moment, gazing out at the silent veldt.

"I heard he was in Klipplaat. Or maybe Willowmore. He hasn't come back here again."

On the westernmost horizon, a waxing crescent Moon hovered above the dusty flatlands like a pair of huge crimson horns, while above us the Milky Way shone with shocking clarity, as if its stars were bright diamonds spread against the black velvet viewing board of the night.

"You drove it away, huh?"

"It wasn't me. It was the power of the Lord."

"If you say so."

Reaching for my tobacco pouch, I started back towards the dirt road where we had left the car. Beneath that scintillating cosmic panorama, the tiny town of Steytlerville looked very small indeed, and not a little vulnerable.

After Hannes's stand-off with the demon, the police had vigorously searched the surrounding area. While no trace of the elusive *Bawokazi* could be found, Warrant Officer Nelani had decided not to take any chances and officially opened a file on the sightings, urging residents who saw the beast to try to get some photographs next time. Thus far, no snapshots or any other material evidence to support the Steytlerville Monster's physical existence have been forthcoming, suggesting that the answer to what really took place here might be found buried deep within the community's psyche, in the socio-political tensions that haunt the new South Africa rather than within the realms of cryptozoology. Yet how many identical files lay gathering dust in the charge offices of small towns like this one spread out across the Great Karoo, Namaqua land and Southern Namibia? A great many, I suspect – their details often curiously familiar, the paper trail of the Dust Devil, the undying shape-shifter who will walk these roads until the stars grow dim and the Sun grows cold. FT

Author Biography

RICHARD STANLEY is a film-maker, anthropologist and author. His latest project is an adaptation of Clark Ashton Smith's 'Mother of Toads", part of the *Theatre Bizarre* anthology film. His ebook *The Shadow of the Grail* is available from Amazon: http://amzn.to/NIac8.

WorldMags

AMELIA'S FINAL FLIGHT

Seventy-five years ago, Amelia Earhart, the world's most celebrated aviatrix, disappeared over the Pacific during what was meant to be a record-breaking round-the-world flight. **DUNCAN E TURNER** looks back at aviation's most famous mystery and talks to the investigator who thinks that it is, at last, about to be solved.

On 2 July 1937, at around midnight GMT, Amelia Earhart, America's foremost female adventurer and media darling, and her navigator Fred Noonan, set off from Lae in Papua New Guinea, bound for Howland Island. They never arrived at their destination, and with the subsequent failure to locate any evidence of plane or person, the mystery of "What Happened To Amelia Earhart?" has only grown with time.

Almost 75 years to that fateful day, we could be on the verge of discovering the truth. In doing so, we would not only be able to put to bed once and for all the many strange and wonderfully contrived theories that have grown up around the disappearance of Earhart and Noonan, but also celebrate the legacy of these two famous adventurers.

In recent years, The International Group for Historic Aircraft Recovery (TIGHAR) has revived a forgotten theory: that Amelia lived out her last days as a castaway on Nikumaroro (formerly Gardner) Island after landing on its shallow coral reef – and TIGHAR think they will soon be able to prove it. As their 2012 expedition, dubbed Niku 7 (in fact, TIGHAR's ninth voyage to Nikumaroro) gathers pace, and with the 75th anniversary of the disappearance of one of the 20th century's iconic figures drawing close, TIGHAR Executive Director Richard E Gillespie shared his thoughts on what the truth might actually be (see interview panel), and how he hopes to accomplish something so many others have speculated about, prodded, and even dismissed as being no mystery at all.

THE EARHART MYSTERY HAS ONLY GROWN WITH TIME

FLYING LEGEND

There can be few people who haven't heard of Amelia Earhart (b.1897) – if not for her accomplishments in life, then for her unexplained end. She was a groundbreaking all-American heroine, a darling of the media, a shining star to rival those of a booming Hollywood and a role model at a time when new doors were opening to women. Her fame across the world remains as high as ever, fuelled by the continuing speculation over her ultimate fate.

In 1920, at the age of just 23, Amelia was given her first taste of flying, as a passenger, and was smitten, famously stating: "By the time I had got two or three hundred feet off the ground I knew I had to fly." Working at all sorts of jobs, she saved enough to pay for flying lessons, bought a leather flying jacket and cut her hair short, in the style of other female aviators. Eight years later, in 1928, she became the first woman to cross the Atlantic by air, but even that feat, plus her newfound celebrity status, wasn't enough to satisfy Earhart. On that flight she was not the pilot, and it was across only one ocean. Her destiny cried out for more than a single sea crossing in the back of Fokker F.VII, and so in 1934 she again crossed the Atlantic, this time as the pilot of a single-engine Lockheed Vega 5B. She was fêted and decorated for this feat, but again came the urge to conquer new frontiers. By 1937, Amelia was planning to cross the globe by a winding route

LEFT: Amelia Earhart and navigator Fred Noonan in June 1937.

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IN SEARCH OF AMELIA'S ISLAND

AS TIGHAR UNDERTAKES A NEW EXPEDITION TO NIKUMARORO IN JULY 2012 IN THE HOPE OF SOLVING ONE OF AVIATION'S GREATEST MYSTERIES, DUNCAN TURNER SPOKE TO THE ORGANISATION'S EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, RIC GILLESPIE.

TIGHAR PHOTO, USED BY PERMISSION

TIGHAR PHOTO, USED BY PERMISSION

ABOVE: The TIGHAR team in action as they investigate the Nikumaroro site.

DUNCAN TURNER: What first drew you to investigate Amelia and Fred's disappearance?

RIC GILLESPIE: In a word, logic.

DT: Why was the generally accepted report of them being lost at sea not enough for you personally?

RG: Actually, it was. We started TIGHAR in 1985. We were working on another historic missing airplane – "The White Bird" of Charles Nungesser and François Coli, who disappeared trying to fly the Atlantic just 10 days before Lindbergh did it. People were constantly after me to investigate the Earhart disappearance. My response was always: "She got lost and ran out of fuel trying to find a tiny island in a big ocean. Their airplane is somewhere 17,000ft [5,000m] down and the technology doesn't exist to find it. Nothing substantive can be done, the whole thing is a media circus and I want no part of it."

DT: What changed your mind?

RG: In 1988, two TIGHAR members, Tom Gannon and Tom Willi, said they wanted to tell me about their Amelia Earhart theory. I said, "I don't want to hear *any* Amelia Earhart theories!" But they insisted. To my surprise, they didn't tell me tales of the South Pacific about what some Marine had seen on Saipan. They were retired military aerial navigators and they talked about the science of celestial navigation. They pointed out that the last radio transmission from Earhart, "We are on the line 157 337... Running on line north and south," makes perfect sense to a celestial aerial navigator. Earhart and Noonan were doing just what they should have been doing under the circumstances – running along a navigational Line of Position (LOP) that would lead them to either their intended destination (Howland Island) or one of three other islands – Baker, McKean or Gardner – that lay along the same line. We know they didn't reach Howland or Baker, but no one had ever searched McKean or Gardner.

I said, "You guys are telling me that nobody has ever looked for Amelia Earhart in the most likely place?"

They said, "That's the way it looks to us."

My next thought was: "We can't search an ocean, but we can search an island. If the aircraft reached either of those islands, there should be something still there. Damn! It looks like we're going to have to go looking for Amelia after all!"

If you had told me then that we'd *still* be working on it 10 expeditions and 24 years later, I'd have said you were crazy.

DT: What do you feel is a realistic goal for your 2012 expedition, Niku 7?

RG: Sonar returns that show the wreckage of the aircraft.

DT: Given that TIGHAR stands for The International Group for Historic Aircraft Recovery, is finding Amelia's Electra your main focus, and also the key to proving the Nikumaroro theory is correct?

RG: We have other historic aircraft recovery projects in progress, but Earhart's is head and shoulders above everything else in terms of public interest. I think finding the wreckage is key to proving the Nikumaroro theory correct. We already have an overwhelming 'preponderance of evidence' but the public – or rather the media – demand a 'smoking gun'.

DT: TIGHAR is not the only team to have attempted to find the Electra and concrete evidence of Amelia's fate. What gives you continued hope that you will be the ones to succeed where others have failed?

RG: We have already succeeded where others have failed. We have found extensive and diverse archival, photographic and artefactual evidence to support our hypothesis. Nobody else has anything but conflicting anecdotal recollections and speculation.

DT: You have been to Nikumaroro several times and experienced conditions there first hand. How long do you think Amelia and Fred could realistically have survived on the island?

RG: The determining factor would probably be how often it rained and whether they figured out some way to collect the water when it did. We see evidence that they were collecting and boiling water and eating birds, fish and clams. My guess is that Amelia survived for a few weeks, possibly months.

DT: Without readily available fresh water, they must have realised the island was a death trap and attempted to leave?

RG: Leave? How? They didn't have enough gas to fly anywhere and they apparently didn't know where they were, so they didn't know what direction to go to get to somewhere else.

DT: Obviously Amelia's name grabs the headlines, and items such as the 1930s cosmetics found generate great interest, but what evidence, if any, of Fred's presence on Nikumaroro has been found?

RG: Not much. There is a sextant box that was apparently Fred's (the numbers are right) but there was no sextant, so the box might have been used by the castaway or castaways as just a way to carry stuff. Parts of a man's shoe were also found at the site in 1940, but shoes would be important on the island, and a woman can wear a man's shoe...

DT: There is the suggestion, from the debated radio broadcast, that Fred was possibly injured at some point on, or after, landing. Do you think it likely that Fred would therefore have been the first to pass away?

RG: Yes. I think that's likely – but it's only speculation.

DT: What one piece of evidence that TIGHAR has uncovered so far would you say is the most critical or intriguing, and why?

RG: People ask me that all the time. Again, it's that appetite for a single, simple smoking gun. The strength of our case is that we've found lots of critical and intriguing pieces of evidence that I'd summarise as follows:

The fact that the remains of a castaway were found on the island three years after Earhart disappeared. Nobody else is missing.

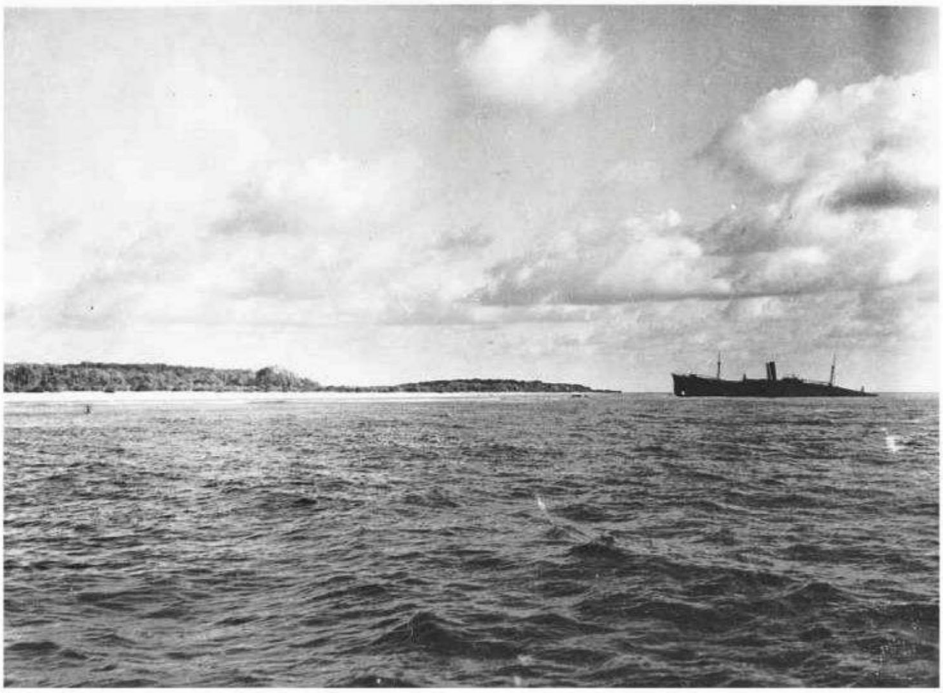
The indications that there were two castaways, one male and one female.

The numbers on the sextant box indicate that it was the same kind of sextant Noonan used as a backup.

The artefacts we've found at the site speak of an American woman of the 1930s and are clearly associated with the castaway or castaways.

Our recently completed Catalogue and Analysis of the Post-Loss Radio Signals shows that the Earhart aircraft did not go down at sea.[1]

Forensic analysis of what's been called the 'Nessie' photograph [a photo taken off Nikumaroro three months after the disappearance which recent analysis suggests shows wreckage from an aircraft] is making a more and more convincing case that it shows a landing gear leg from a Lockheed Electra.



TIGHAR PHOTO, USED BY PERMISSION

TIGHAR PHOTO, USED BY PERMISSION

ABOVE: The island of Nikumaroro, showing the wreck of the *SS Norwich City* at right.

BELOW: Remains of a cosmetics jar found on Nikumaroro.

DT: Why do you think so little was made of Gerald Gallagher's discovery of a skeleton on the island?

RG: A great deal was made of Gallagher's discovery. It went right to the top of the British administration in the Pacific and was kept strictly secret. It was only dismissed when the doctor determined (erroneously) that the bones could not be Earhart's.

DT: Will Niku 7 be documented by any methods, as with The Discovery Channel on previous expeditions, and how can we all keep up to date while you're out in the field?

RG: Negotiations with Discovery are still in progress, but the expedition will be professionally filmed in any event. During the expedition, we'll keep the world informed via daily updates on our website (http://tighar.org/) as usual.

NOTES

1 http://bit.ly/HNNqta (tighar.org), TIGHAR Earhart Project Catalog and Analysis of Radio Signal.

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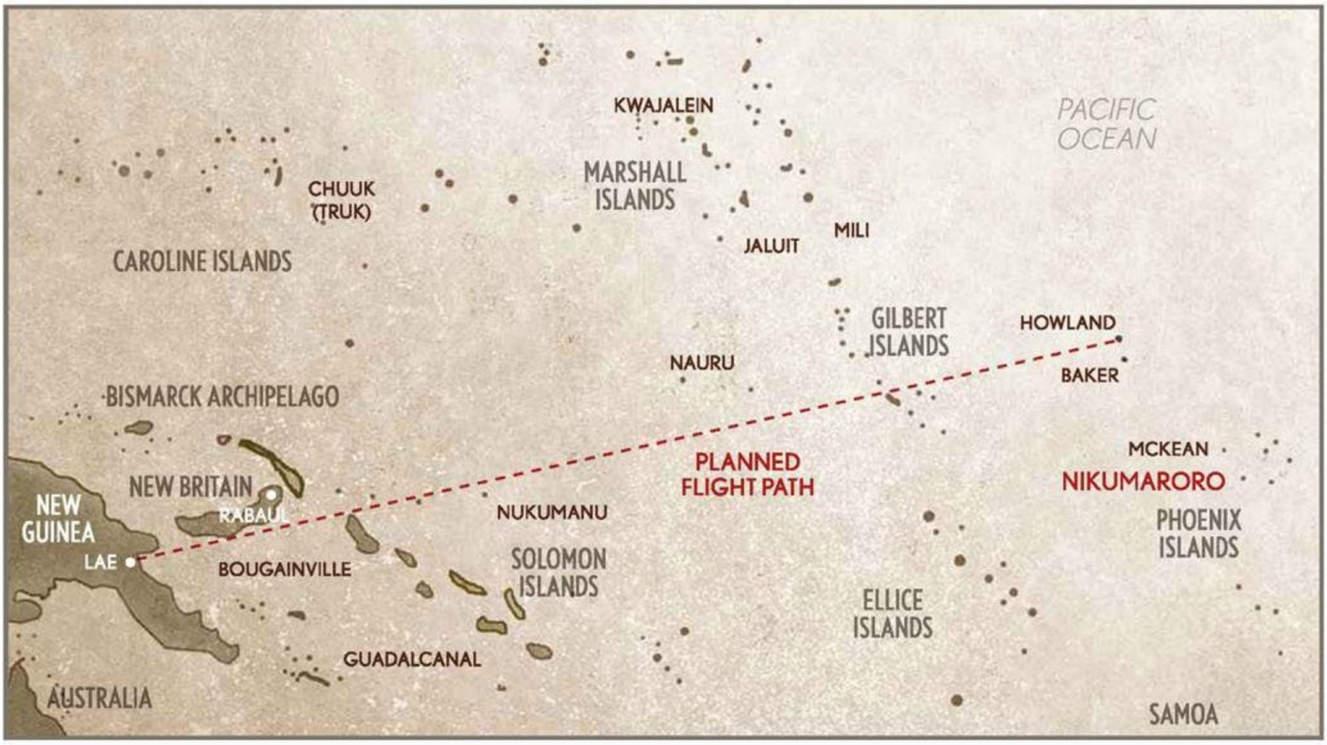


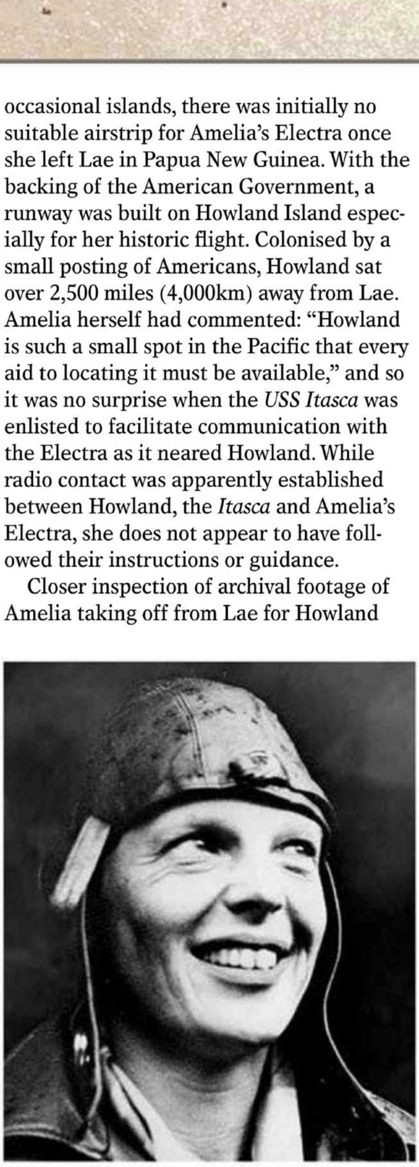
over several continents and having to cross both Atlantic and Pacific Oceans (a total distance of 29,000 miles or 46,670km). Her route crossed North America, then flew to South America before crossing the Atlantic to Africa, then on to India and South-East Asia, hopping from airstrip to airstrip, on an incredible round the world trip.

A Lockheed Electra E10 aircraft was selected for the job, heavily modified to cope with the demands of such a journey, greater fuel capacity being the foremost concern. A crew was assembled to accompany Amelia, a mix of celebrities and various experts, including Fred Noonan as second navigator, a well-known figure in the world of aviation. Having begun his career on the seas, and showing a flair for adventure and the unknown, Noonan had turned his attention to the skies. Getting a pilot's license, he gained further flying experience with Pan Am, training new recruits and charting commercial airline routes across the Pacific.

Indeed, the greatest challenge would prove to be navigating the great expanse of the Pacific and Noonan's experience here was key. The original plan for this world record attempt would have seen the Pacific challenge tackled early on, but Earhart and Noonan's first attempt was cut short by mechanical problems. As Amelia continued to simultaneously plan the journey and court the media, all of the original crew-members save Noonan drifted away from the project. For the second attempt it was decided, due to shifting weather patterns, to tackle the Atlantic first, and to complete the journey via the Pacific and back to the United States.

Though Amelia and Fred never appeared anxious in public, they must have dreaded the Pacific crossing. Dotted only with occasional islands, there was initially no suitable airstrip for Amelia's Electra once she left Lae in Papua New Guinea. With the backing of the American Government, a runway was built on Howland Island especially for her historic flight. Colonised by a small posting of Americans, Howland sat over 2,500 miles (4,000km) away from Lae. Amelia herself had commented: "Howland is such a small spot in the Pacific that every aid to locating it must be available," and so it was no surprise when the *USS Itasca* was enlisted to facilitate communication with the Electra as it neared Howland. While radio contact was apparently established between Howland, the *Itasca* and Amelia's Electra, she does not appear to have followed their instructions or guidance.

Closer inspection of archival footage of Amelia taking off from Lae for Howland possibly reveals the answer – as the plane gathers speed down the basic runway, there is a brief explosion of dust toward the rear of the aircraft, which, it has been suggested, could have been the fuel-laden Electra's receiving radio antenna breaking.[1] Others have put forward the idea that Earhart and Noonan's onboard maps were inaccurate; and so with visibility hindered by cloud and no responses to their calls for guidance, Amelia, Fred and their Electra disappeared into the history books.



ABOVE: Earhart photographed in London in 1932 following her solo Atlantic flight.

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MYSTERIES AND THEORIES

But the story did not end there. Speculation about Amelia Earhart's fate began soon after her disappearance, and continues to this day.

One theory was that Amelia and Fred were captured by the Japanese after landing on occupied Saipan and were either executed or died in a Japanese prison. Another rumour had the captured Amelia forced to become one of the voices of the infamous Tokyo Rose, whose radio broadcasts during World War II aimed to undermine US troop morale during conflict in the Pacific. Amelia's husband, George P Putnam, was sufficiently intrigued to listen to numerous recordings of the Tokyo Rose broadcasts, only to conclude that he did not believe that any of the voices he heard was that of his wife.[2]

Others claimed that, tired of fame and marriage, Amelia had sought to fake her own death and disappear from the public gaze into a new life. Elsewhere, it was suggested the Electra had been smuggling gold bullion, and actually went down much closer to Papua New Guinea.[3] Amelia even made a surprise return to Earth at the end of Steven Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, leaving the mother ship with others 'taken' over the years by ET and his buddies.

The most straightforward theory was that they had simply run out of fuel, searching desperately for Howland, ultimately plummeting into the ocean, helpless to avoid their fate; with no plane, bodies or other evidence ever found, this, at face value, fits nicely and is perfectly plausible. It's the conclusion also reached by Elgen and Marie Long in their book *Amelia Earhart: The Mystery Solved*, where they conclude that the Electra "is lying quietly on the ocean floor in the deep water near Howland Island… Of course the area within 100 miles [160km] of Howland Island encompasses 34,416 square miles [89,000 sq km]."[4]

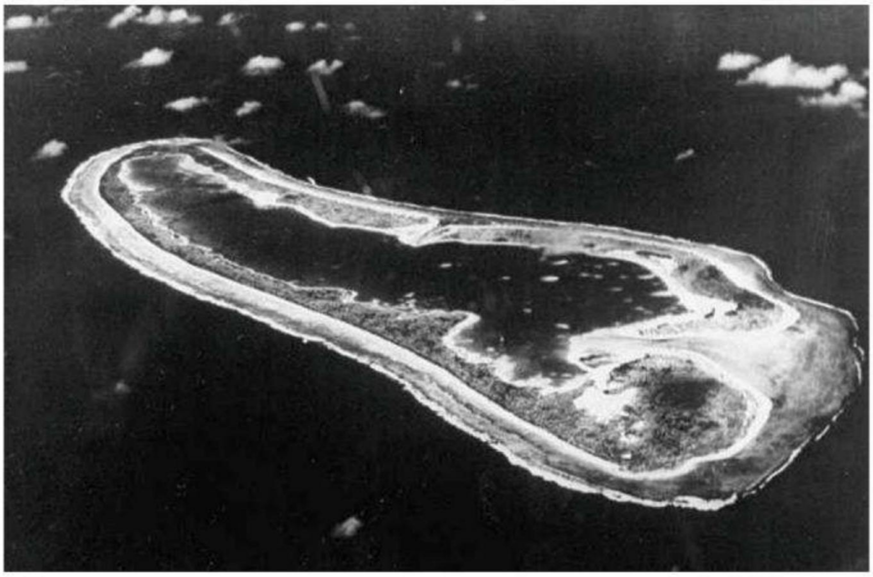
So why not just accept this simple theory? Well, everyone loves a good mystery… and on this occasion there seems to be just enough circumstantial evidence to swing one's thinking toward a more interesting explanation.

Following the flyers' disappearance, a massive search was authorised by President Roosevelt. Nine ships and over 60 aircraft – at an estimated cost of over $4 million at the time – were drafted in to find the celebrated pair. All returned having found no trace. Next, Putnam financed a search of his own, desperate to locate his wife. Interestingly, his search concentrated on numerous Pacific island clusters. Either he didn't believe, or couldn't bring himself to believe, that Amelia's plane had gone down miles from land.

THE NIKUMARORO HYPOTHESIS

Incredibly, mounting evidence suggests that one of the first areas searched at the time of Amelia's disappearance, the Phoenix Islands (now part of the Republic of Kiribati), 350 miles (560km) south of Howland, may be the one that reveals the truth about what really happened. This is the area in which, since 1998, Ric Gillespie and TIGHAR have been concentrating their efforts, and the fragments of evidence they have uncovered are intriguing.

Nikumaroro, then Gardner Island, was one of the islands flown over by a search plane in 1937. Signs of life were reported, but dismissed as probably natives, the searchers evidently unaware of Gardner's 1937 population of zero. A radio transmission received by a little girl in Florida was similarly brushed aside, this time as a hoax, although the girl swore to the truth of the incident. She noted that Earhart was calling for help and mentioned something that sounded like "New York City". It's hard to see why New York City would be of any significance, but in 1937 Gardner Island contained the rusting wreck of the *SS Norwich City*.[5] Furthermore, survivors from the *Norwich City*, which met its fate just two years earlier, reported leaving supplies on Gardner Island. In his official report, *Norwich City*'s Captain, Daniel Hamer, stated: "Before leaving camp all provisions etc., were placed in the shelter, but I sincerely hope that no one will ever be so unfortunate as to need them."[6] Survival on Gardner Island would, then, have been possible for castaways.



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ABOVE: Nikumaroro seen from the air – was this Amelia Earhart's final resting place?

In 1940, Gerald Gallagher, a British colonial officer stationed at Gardner's recently established British settlement, reported to his superiors that he had found a partial skeleton which he suspected might be the remains of Amelia Earhart, along with a 1930s-style sextant box, under a tree on the island's southeast corner. The remains were flown to Fiji where they were evaluated as those of a male, before being lost. In the late 1980s, the recorded data was re-evaluated, and it was found perfectly likely it had been a female skeleton.[7]

Furthermore, TIGHAR has reported the discovery of items on Nikumaroro that suggest a female's presence there in the 1930s, including cosmetics popular at the time of Amelia's disappearance and a shoe bearing the imprint "Cat's Paw Rubber Company, USA".

Gardner Island was uninhabited between 1894 and 1938, but saw occupation in the years either side and up until the British settlement project ended in 1956. Several of these colonists recalled an aeroplane, or part of one, which sat for years off the north-west of the island before finally slipping into the sea for good. Indeed, these same villagers claim to have salvaged parts of the aircraft for their housing, and pieces recovered from the remains of their village would reportedly not have looked at all out of place on a 1930s Lockheed Electra 10E.[8] TIGHAR finds have included improvised tools, an aluminium panel and a piece of Plexiglas that could conceivably have come from an Electra. Subsequent expeditions turned up ball bearings, a rusted zipper, possibly from a flying suit, and what might be the remains of a human finger (DNA testing was ambiguous).

None of this is definitive, but it's highly suggestive. Ric Gillespie, executive director of TIGHAR, believes that the evidence he has uncovered is compelling enough to be taken seriously and warrants further investigation. In July, he leads Niku 7, TIGHAR's latest expedition to Nikumaroro, where he hopes to find further pieces of the puzzle.

TIGHAR's Nikumaroro theory is certainly hotly debated out there in the wider community. After all, anyone could have planted some 1930s cosmetics on the island between 1937 and their recent discovery. Does "New York City" really mean *Norwich City*? Where is the controversial lost skeleton now? Who really owned that Cat's Paw footwear?

Whatever your views, this year presents us with a fantastic opportunity to get closer to the truth after so many years – and this can only be accomplished through good old-fashioned investigation and hard work. Hopefully, Niku 7 will offer up more discoveries for discussion and debate. Seventy-five years on, after decades of speculation, this might be an opportunity to finally give Fred and Amelia's story an ending – even as their legend lives on. FT

NOTES

1 http://bit.ly/900nwg (YouTube); anomaly at 26 secs.

2 http://bit.ly/lWsD4X (YouTube); audio only, comparison of voices.

3 http://bit.ly/Jew7Sm (Radio Australia news report).

4 EL Long & MK Long: *Amelia Earhart: The Mystery Solved*, Simon & Schuster, 2009, p235.

5 http://bit.ly/dLepgn (tighar.org), scans of notebook.

6 http://bit.ly/JaYTlf (tighar.org), full statement of Captain Daniel Hamer of the *SS Norwich City*.

7 http://bit.ly/lWtMcl (tighar.org), timeline of discovery and loss of the partial skeleton.

8 http://bit.ly/JsuC4S (tighar.org), list of artefacts found on Nikumaroro by TIGHAR.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

DUNCAN E TURNER is a freelance writer and *FT* subscriber, with a background in historical studies and an unhealthy desire to delve into the murky depths that they didn't want to teach us about at school.

World Mags

GOING NATIVE

Anthropologists studying ‘primitive’ cultures and their supernatural beliefs have often reported paranormal experiences of their own. Are these cases of culture shock – or the result of cultural relativism? **ED DUTTON** examines what happens when fieldwork gets out of hand…

Anthropologists are the most hands-on of any university professors. Not for them the laboratories, experiments and box-ticking surveys of their white-coated scientist colleagues. Whether it’s nomads on the freezing Arctic Tundra or spirit-worshipping hunters deep in the heart of the Venezuelan Rain Forest, many anthropologists leave the tutorials and dusty college libraries far behind to meet exotic peoples on their own turf and live as they live, learning to see the world through the eyes of a native.

It wasn’t always this way. Anthropology was once a gentlemanly hobby, pursued by Victorian men of leisure from their armchairs in Chelsea or from the comfort of the colonial compound. Poring over explorers’ accounts or interviewing friendly natives, brought to them on their verandas, they tried to get down to each culture’s essentials (What were its myths? What was its social structure?) without dirtying their immaculately tailored suits.

All this changed in the 1920s after Polish anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski (1884–1942; pictured right) was forced to stay on the Trobriand Islands during World War I. As an Austro-Hungarian, he was an enemy alien, so the Australian authorities, in whose country he was doing fieldwork at the time, had given him a choice of exile in the Trobriand Islands or internment. With no other option, he learnt the language, lived as the tribe lived; and his successors, seeing how much better he understood his subject than had his predecessors, resolved to do exactly the same thing. But in immersing themselves in strange, primitive and often frightening ways of life, many anthropologists pushed themselves to the brink of sanity, taking their confidence in Western science and reason to the cliff’s edge along the way. In some cases, they began to experience reality itself in accordance with tribal beliefs. Witchcraft seemed real, shamans could magically cure ailments; one anthropologist even became a shaman himself, claiming he could turn into a crow.

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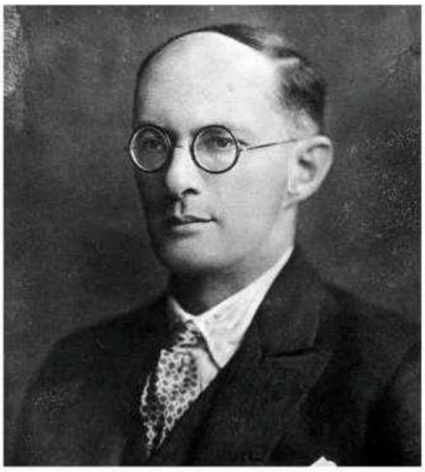
MALINOWSKI SANG TO A WAGNER TUNE THE WORDS KISS MY ASS



WITCHES IN THE BELLY

As his posthumously published diaries attest, in-depth fieldwork almost sent Bronislaw Malinowski mad. A neurotic character anyway, he was obsessed with hygiene in an environment he described as “a rotten hole”.[1] He fulminated against the tribesmen, writing at one point that: “On the whole my feelings toward the natives are decidedly tending to ‘*Exterminate the brutes*’.”[2] But he never went so far as to accept as true the tribe’s way of understanding reality itself. On 19 December 1917, Malinowski wrote: “At night, a little tired, but not exhausted, I sang, to a Wagner melody, the words ‘Kiss my ass’ to chase away *mulukwausi*” [flying witches].[3] This, though, seems to have been just a bit of fun.

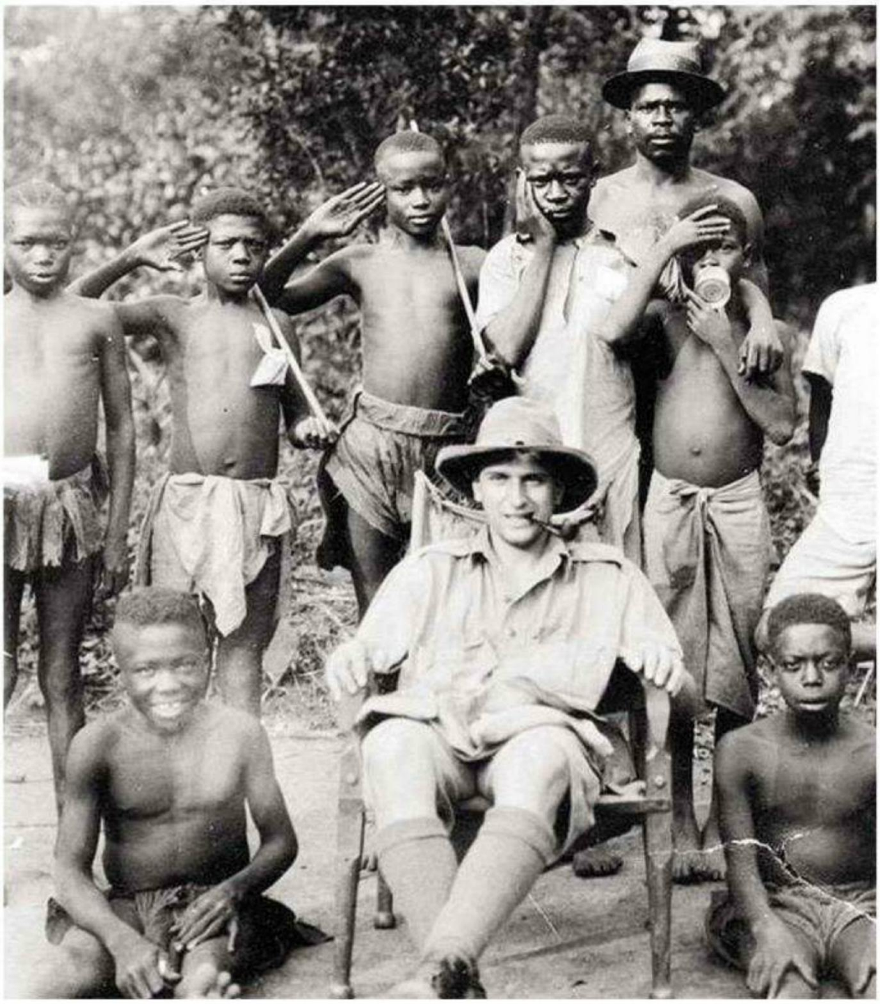
It was EE Evans-Pritchard (1902–1973) who took his professor’s sense of fun to a whole new level. Evans-Pritchard seems an unlikely figure to blur the strict boundaries between anthropological ‘science’ and the world of the spirits. A vicar’s son, the Sussex-born Sudan-expert seems in every way the stereotypical English gent. But after Winchester public school and Exeter College, Oxford, the young history graduate made his way to the London School of Economics, where he studied for his PhD, partly under the revolutionary Dr Malinowski. From 1926, he spent a whole year living with the Azande people of southern Sudan, then still under British rule. Traditionally animists, the Azande, Evans-Pritchard found, believed that witchcraft was a kind of inherited autonomous substance which lived in people’s stomachs. And from its belly-based citadel, it would perform bad magic on its host’s enemies – including killing them. Sometimes unaware of their powers, witches could end up dispatching people to whom they wished relatively little harm. For the Azande, therefore, there was no such thing as an accident. As Evans-Pritchard summarised it: “Witchcraft explains unfortunate events.”[4]

However, spending so much time with the Azande, it was Evans-Pritchard who started to wonder how events could be explained.

“I had been sitting late in my hut writing notes. About midnight, before retiring, I took a spear and went for my usual nocturnal stroll. I was walking in the garden at the back of my hut… when I noticed a bright light passing at the back of my servants’ huts towards the homestead of a man called Tupoi.”[5]

He wondered if somebody was lighting a handful of grass because they had gone to defecate. However, not long afterwards, a close relative of his friend Tupoi, in the direction of whose house the light was moving, suddenly died. What had happened

precisely fitted with the Azande understanding of witchcraft. Witches operated at night, those who disturb them witness "the light of witchcraft" and those the light is aimed at die soon afterwards. Evans-Pritchard found himself unable to dismiss the possibility that this might just be what had happened. In later writings, he refuses to rule it out, arguing: "There is no possibility of the anthropologist knowing whether the spiritual beings of primitive religions… have any existence or not." [6] In 1956, when writing of the religion of the Nuer people, another Sudanese tribe, he claimed to have reached a point where "the theologian takes over from the anthropologist" [7] and by 1965 he was claiming that you could only make sense of religion if you thought it was real. Towards the end of his life, he converted to Catholicism, arguing that people of all religions experience "the same transcendental reality". [8] The man of science, motivated by the desire to find social facts, was now closer to the Azande tribesman than he was to many of his anthropological colleagues. Unable to explain away his intense experience of witchcraft, he had convinced himself that the non-material world was a reality.



ABOVE: EE Evans-Pritchard with Azande boys in the Sudan. **BELOW:** An Azande mask.

OCCULT EVENTS

And he wasn't the only anthropologist to do so. Born in Glasgow to an electrician and an actress, Victor Turner (1920–1983) became fascinated by anthropology as a non-combatant soldier during World War II. After the war, he studied anthropology at University College London and, entranced by it, went off to Manchester University to do a PhD on the subject. The fieldwork for his doctorate took place in the early 1950s amongst the Ndembu people, who live in what is now Zambia. Turner was most fascinated by the tribe's Chihamba cult. Devotees would dance themselves into a frenzy and heal one another. His wife, Edith Turner, alongside whom he conducted his fieldwork, later recalled witnessing the paranormal at one of these meetings:

I SAW A GIANT THING EMERGING FROM THE FLESH OF HER BACK

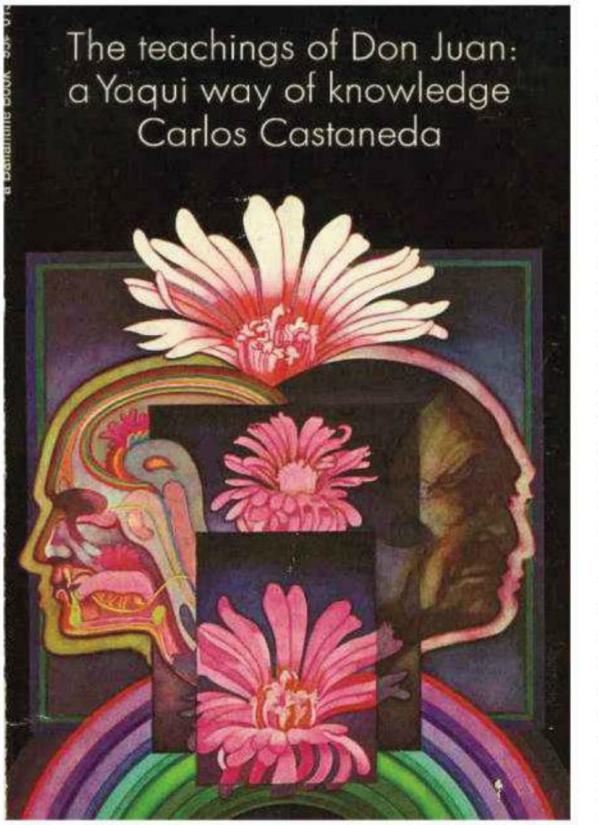
"Suddenly Meru raised her arm, stretched it in liberation, and I saw with my own eyes a giant thing emerging out of the flesh of her back. This thing was a large grey blob about six inches [15cm] across, a deep grey opaque thing emerging as a sphere. I was amazed – delighted… The grey thing was actually out there, visible… and then the thing was there no more." [9]

The experience was so powerful that the Turners started to throw science aside, arguing that anthropologists could learn from prophets and poets. Victor wrote: "We must ourselves be humble if we are to glimpse, if not comprehend, the spiritual truths represented by (the Chihamba)." [10] In 1957, the Turners converted to Catholicism and started to argue that it was pointless trying to make sense of religion… you just had to believe it.

Many other anthropologists are convinced that they have experienced the paranormal during their fieldwork, although it wasn't something they often discussed at the time, for fear of being shunned by scientific colleagues. American Frank Salamone did his fieldwork with the Gungawa people of Nigeria. "On one or two occasions in the field I have felt in the presence of some sort of power or phenomenon that I could not readily explain – or explain away." Central to this group were the *bori* – revered shamans and healers. Salamone recalls how he first met 'Bori Jugun Hella' in 1970 and dismissed him as a "clown". In fact, he played the fool to get people to come near him, so frightened were they of his reputed powers. Salamone insists: "Bori always seemed to know when I was approaching him… He was able to tell me my worries and desires without my articulating them… Bori knew my secret thoughts and even foretold what I would do." [11]

Indeed, two American sociologists – James McLennon and Jennifer Nooney – were so fascinated by the way that their anthropological colleagues reported paranormal experiences that they decided to chart the kind of events reported. They analysed 40 accounts of paranormal experiences reported by 16 anthropologists between about the 1960s and the 1990s. They compared these to a survey of 1,578 paranormal experiences conducted by students in North Carolina. They found clear, possibly significant differences in the kinds and numbers of experience associated with each group. The main paranormal experiences of anthropologists involved 'Apparition' (32.5 per cent), 'Healing' (25 per cent) and 'Waking Extra Sensory Perception' (22.5 per cent). Amongst the North Carolina sample, 'Apparition' was still the highest (32 per cent), but only 5 and 7 per cent respectively experienced or witnessed 'Waking ESP' or 'Healing'. 10.7 per cent reported 'Psychokinesis', compared to just 2.5 per cent of 'anthropologists'. 11.3 per cent reported 'Paranormal Dreams' (10 per cent anthropologists) and 5.5 percent 'Sleep Paralysis' (2.5 per cent anthropologists). But at 5 percent against 2.7 per cent, anthropologists reported more 'Occult Events'.[12]

BELOW: Carlos Castaneda's first book, which led to international acclaim. **BOTTOM:** The young Castaneda – a rare picture of a reclusive man.



THE TRICKSTER

However, probably the most extreme case of an anthropologist immersing himself so deeply in his fieldwork that his findings superficially defy rational explanation has to be that of Carlos Castaneda (1925–1998; see **FT117:42–44** for a full-length profile; also **FT238:52–53**). Originally from Peru, the naturalised American anthropologist was to become a guru to the New Age Movement. Moving to the USA in the 1950s, Castaneda studied Anthropology at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA), graduating with a PhD in 1973, the contents of which were so explosive that, when parts of it had been published, the obscure academic made the cover of *Time* magazine.[13] Promised a great grade by his supervisor if he succeeded, Castaneda had made his way in the early Sixties to Nagoles, Arizona, on the Mexican border, in search of a genuine Native American shaman. Shamans had long fascinated anthropologists. Central to 'primitive' tribes, these charismatic figures – part doctor, part priest and part seer – were able to enter a trance, travel to the spirit world, fight the spirits and so solve the tribe's problems. For such tribes, everything – plants, trees, animals, mountains – has an underlying 'spirit' which must be appeased. Shamans often used hallucinogenic plants to open up the gates of this invisible spirit realm. According to Castaneda, he found a shaman – and his name was Don Juan Matus, from the Yaqui tribe.

If he had followed anthropological research methods, Castaneda would have simply interviewed Matus, observed his way of life and analysed the findings – but he went a lot further. Castaneda wrote that Matus invited him to take peyote, a strongly hallucinogenic cactus which Matus himself used as a means of entering the spirit world. Before its effects kicked in, Castaneda remembered people laughing about "the stupidity of sharks"[14] but eventually "every memory came back to me… all was clear in my mind."[15] He "saw a black dog", which became "iridescent", a glow radiating from its body.[16] Matus was ecstatic. Apparently, this *was* the plant's 'spirit' and this was the first time that this spirit had appeared to a "white man". Matus offered to make Castaneda his apprentice, so that Casteneda could himself (after a four-year apprenticeship) become a shaman. Breaking with anthropological convention – you're supposed to study an entire culture, not just one member of it – Castanada accepted. Malinowski could never have dreamed of seeing the world through his subjects' eyes' to the degree that Castanada seemed set on doing.

Castaneda had 'gone native' – something that for traditional anthropologists destroys any claims to 'academic' authority.

Next, Matus introduced Castaneda to even more powerful drugs, *Datura stramonium* (Jimson weed) and hallucinogenic mushrooms, the consumption of which convinced the anthropologist that – in line with shamanic traditions – he had turned into a crow and was able to fly. Eventually, Castaneda was close to mental collapse, unable to distinguish reality from the 'world of the spirits'. Shamanistic practices had permitted him a glimpse of other realities that were just as real as that of everyday life.

He returned to UCLA and published parts of his thesis in 1968 as *The Teachings of Don Juan*. A publishing sensation, the book made Castaneda extremely rich practically overnight. He wrote two subsequent titles about Matus, and currently his 12 books have sold over eight million copies altogether. The hippies in the USA at the time were strongly influenced by anthropologists such as Margaret Mead (1901–1978), who argued that all differences were down to culture, that cultures could only be understood in their own terms and that Westerners could learn a great deal from supposedly 'primitive' societies which, as far as she was concerned, were often 'perfectly adjusted' egalitarian, free-love paradises.[17] Castaneda gave academic credibility to another dimension of the hippie culture and emergent New Age: drug-taking. The consumption of drugs, if in line with ancient practices of romanticised anthropological subjects, meant that we could enter alternative universes. The success went to Castaneda's head. In 1973, he withdrew from public life to a California compound. He developed an 'inner circle' of female followers, three of whom he bigamously married. He had them change their names, cut their hair short, sever all ties with friends and family and avoid having their photos taken so that they could dedicate themselves to promoting "tensegrity". Tensegrity was supposedly a series of magical, meditative exercises which Matus had taught Castaneda and which had been preserved since before the Spanish conquest of Mexico. By 1995, Castaneda's international company – Cleargreen Inc – was teaching tensegrity, in conditions of great secrecy, to students around the world. The name referred to the fact that ancient Mexican shamans believed the human aura to be "clear green". Castaneda was also convinced that when he died (which happened in 1998) he and his followers would disappear in a magical light.[18]

CULTURE SHOCK

So, how can we explain these apparently anomalous findings, in which trained social scientists go over to the side of the supernatural? There are many possible scientific explanations. The concept of 'culture shock', so familiar to expatriates and businessmen abroad, was first developed into a stage theory by Canadian anthropologist Kalervo Oberg (1901–1973). Culture shock involves four distinct stages. Stage one is the 'Honeymoon Phase', in which the culture is experienced as endlessly fascinating. Stage two is 'Reaction', where people react angrily against the culture, intensely dislike it and romanticise their home culture. Stage three is 'Resignation', in which various coping strategies are developed, and stage four is 'Adjustment,' by which time you have got used to the culture and see it as "just another way of living".[19] If this stage is reached, then 'reverse culture shock' can be experienced on returning home.[20] 'Culture shock' forms an important bond amongst anthropologists – they have

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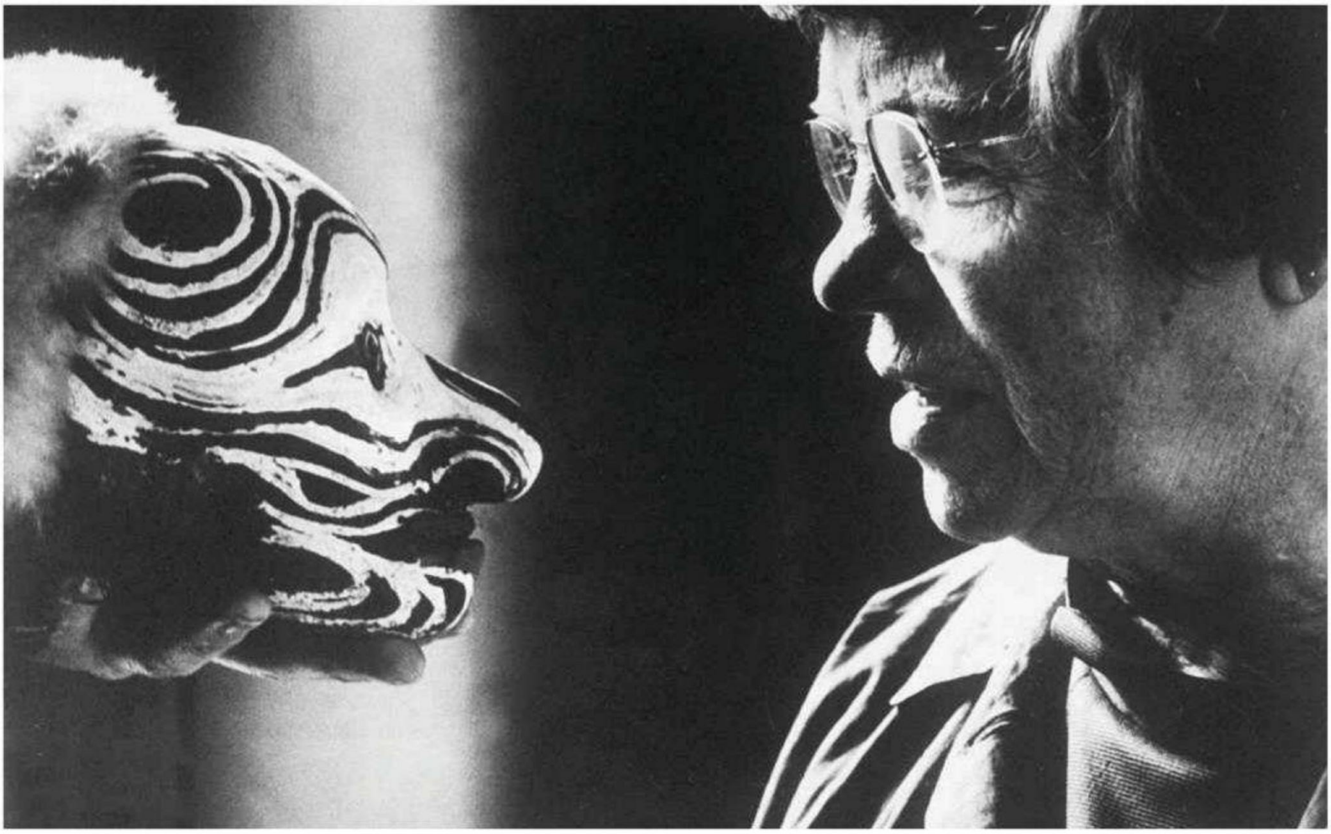
all experienced it. But it is also likely to at least partly explain why they seem so prone to paranormal experiences.

There is a strong body of research indicating that paranormal experiences such as hallucinations are microseizures in the temporal lobes, a point famously demonstrated by Michael Persinger (see **FT42:50–54; 201:4** *et passim*). These are more likely to happen if a person is highly stressed, making them suggestible; religious experiences often happen during such periods.[21] The second stage of culture shock obviously produces a high level of stress. Humans have evolved to be inquisitive and thus enjoy a certain level of risk and novelty – hence the fascination in stage one; but too much uncertainty makes us unhappy and puts us extremely on edge. Living in a foreign culture involves leaving behind many of the things that help our world make sense, especially if the setting is a 'primitive' one. In these circumstances, therefore, paranormal experiences are obviously more likely to occur, and the kinds of drugs taken by Carlos Castaneda clearly induce such experiences by interfering with the body's chemistry – though this doesn't explain why ancient shamans reported such precisely similar experiences. It's also fairly obvious why anthropologists are likely to over-report 'healing', 'ESP' and 'Occult Experiences' – many are working with shamans who do this for a living.

Moreover, there is at least some evidence that the kind of people who become anthropologists are more likely than the general population to experience culture shock symptoms and therefore paranormal activity. Anthropologists, and in general people who succeed at university, appear to be not just highly intelligent but also above averagely anxious. It is suggested that this motivates them to succeed.[22] In addition to being anxious, they also tend to be highly creative. It is creativity – the ability to think originally – that distinguishes the normal, intelligent student from the kind of student who might go on to do a PhD, where an original contribution must be made. There is also research indicating that those who are successful in professions requiring high levels of intelligence and abstract thought are above-averagely neurotic.[23] Moreover, scientists tend to be above-averagely introverted – meaning they have a low threshold for overstimulation and therefore anxiety – and the most successful scientists are also the most creative.[24] What this seems to imply – though it doesn't completely prove – is that anthropologists are above-averagely creative and anxious. High levels of anxiety are correlated with paranormal experiences, as is evidence of creativity, such as proficiency in the arts, something more relevant to humanities and social science students than to scientists.[25] Accordingly, we might suggest that anthropological propensity for the paranormal can be partly explained by the kind of people who become anthropologists – people who are almost always PhD students when they do their fieldwork.

CASTANEDA CLAIMED HIS NOTES WERE LOST IN A FLOOD

Finally, it is important to assess each case in context. Evans-Pritchard's experience could be put down to coincidence, especially as he only reported one experience in the whole time he was in Sudan. The Turners' experience is also highly subjective, parsimoniously explained by their experiencing culture shock and the strong emotion induced by healing rituals, which involve high levels of adrenaline, making people more suggestible. Castaneda's experiences also have a likely explanation: that he was a charlatan. Anthropologist Jay Fikes tracked down the wife of the man, by then dead, who was the Don Juan Matus of Castaneda's books: a shaman called Roman Silva Medina. Medina's wife emphasised that Castaneda didn't ask her husband anything about what shamans do; therefore, he must have concocted the information in his books.[26] Another author, Richard de Mille, found that a lot of experiences in Castaneda's books appeared to be simply plagiarised, almost word for word, from older books.[27] Conveniently, Castaneda claimed that all of his field notes had been destroyed in a flood.



GETTY IMAGES / TIME & LIFE PICTURES / JOHN LOENGARD

ABOVE: Social anthropologist and cultural relativist Margaret Mead, face to face with the other.

INTELLECTUAL ABYSSES

Perhaps the most important question this leaves us with is: "What kind of discipline is anthropology?" How can apparently highly intelligent people be so unable or unwilling to subject their own putative experiences of the paranormal to scientific scrutiny that we cannot discern whether or not these experiences really do challenge scientific orthodoxy? The answer may well lie in the fact that anthropology is a highly subjective 'science' based around fieldwork – which is very difficult to precisely repeat – and interpretation. This means that it is easier for anthropology (and other social sciences, one might argue), than for physical science, to become influenced and even dominated by those who wish to promote a particular ideology. As Polish sociologist Stanislav Andreski noted, social science is always prey to "sorcerers clad in the latest paraphernalia of science".[28] The Romantic Movement, which developed as an anti-rational reaction to the Enlightenment and has had a huge influence ever since, is in some senses similar to the Christian religion it partially replaced. Christianity has God, where Romanticism has a kind of fate; Christianity asserts dogmata (e.g. the Trinity), as does Romanticism (noble savages are better than decadent urbanites; the tribe is better than the city); Christianity condemns its critics as heretics, whereas critics of Romantic thought are condemned as 'Enemies of the People' or, in the case of its two most famous offshoots, 'class enemies' (Marxism) or 'traitors' (nationalism). The most recent manifestations of this movement are Cultural Relativism (which insists that primitive cultures are unique, equal and special and cannot be understood through Western categories) and Post-Modernism (arguing that all Western ideas, including science, are simply assertions by the dominant culture and that there is no 'objective truth'); and if you don't agree, then you're an 'imperialist' or 'reactionary'.

This has led to a crisis in anthropology in which anthropologists have begun to argue that it would be 'imperialist' to suggest that their 'culture' (including science) was superior to that which they studied (even according to inter-culturally shared desires, such as to survive illness). It would be 'imperialist' to try to understand a tribe through our own cultural categories. Instead, anthropologists should simply experience the culture and any related paranormal activity should be interpreted at face value. Not only is this attitude based on controversial dogmata (such as that there is no objective truth) but it leads to a void where we do can nothing. After all, even writing about a different culture inherently involves introducing 'alien' categories quite foreign to that culture.

ABOVE: The real Don Juan? A photograph said to show Roman Silva Medina leaping over rocks on a waterfall.

There is a world of difference between these kinds of anthropologists and the parapsychologists who genuinely attempt to understand and explain the paranormal through scientific methods. The former accept that, to get anywhere, we need a common set of assumptions – and that these are the assumptions of logic, which work in practice. The latter begin their research from dogmata, meaning that it is of no interest to those who don't accept those dogmata, a bit like Mediæval Scholasticism.

These days, among anthropologists of religion, there is an increasing belief in so-called 'methodological agnosticism'. Some anthropologists interpret this as meaning that they should accept the tribe's views at face value; for others, it means simply that you don't go into the field with the assumption that those you are studying hold views which are plain wrong. Rather, you conduct your fieldwork open to the possibility – no matter how small – that there might be something in the supernatural or paranormal beliefs held by your informants. Where modern anthropology has avoided being sucked into the intellectual abyss of postmodernism and other replacement religions of the Romantic Movement, it has therefore become more self-critical – as science should be. FT

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DR EDWARD DUTTON is an anthropologist and freelance writer living in Finland. His latest book *Culture Shock and Multiculturalism* is published by Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

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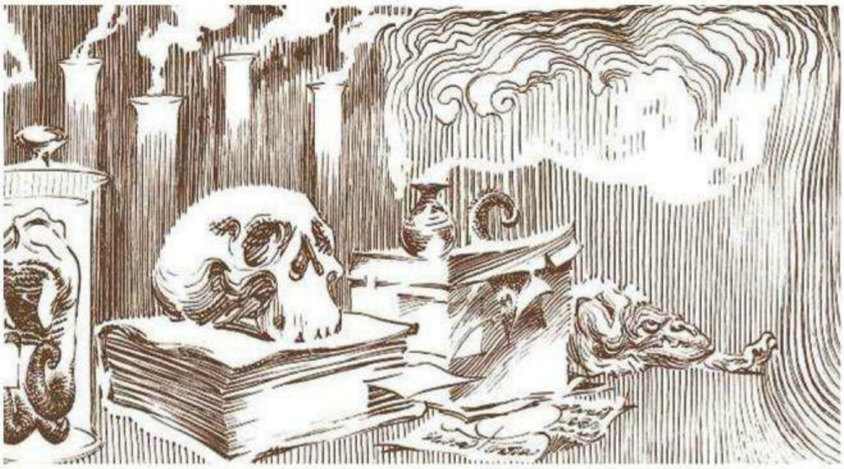
The Fortean Times Random Dictionary of the Damned

compiled by the Hierophant's Apprentice



No 45: CRYPTOZOOLOGY

Cryptozoa (from the Greek: 'hidden animals'), or cryptids, which are half-real, half-legendary, partly-seen but mostly invisible animals not (yet) known to science and whose existence is disputed and/or unsubstantiated, are what cryptozoologists study – or would, if a specimen of these creatures were available for scrutiny. This is the most succinct summary we could create to encapsulate the phenomenological and philosophical difficulty that 'unknown' animals and their investigation present. Cryptozoologists are reduced to studying blurry photographs and films, casts of footprints, and endless 'witness' reports of animals that may or may not exist in actual bodily form; some cryptozoologists go on forays to exotic parts of the globe in the hope of finding specimens.

There is no shortage of creatures to seek: that impeccably reliable source Wikipedia lists over 270 cryptids, although that catalogue includes extinct animals and known hoaxes (among them the fierce, uneven-limbed Wild Haggis of Scotland, and those North American rarities, the Jackalope and Fur-Bearing Trout).[1] There are also an awful lot of lake monsters. We've already expressed our view of them (**FT260:50–53**), and stand by our analysis. In addition, Wikipedia lists recognisably legendary creatures such as mermaids, the thunderbird, and the kraken – but if them, then why not the hydra or the cyclops? One glimpses in such arbitrariness the murky imprecision of the field as much as the elusiveness of its subjects. We might try to pin it down a bit by noting that there are perhaps three broad kinds of cryptid worth investigating:

- **known animals** in non-native habitats (out-of-place animals or OOPAs): such as panthers living in Wales, wallabies in Hawaii, or kangaroos in Illinois.
- **reported and/or rumoured animals** long mentioned by indigenous peoples: examples being the "half-elephant, half-dragon" mokèlé-mbèmbé of the Congo River basin, the Himalayan yeti, West Africa's kikiyaon (a carnivorous owl), or Papua New Guinea's ropen (a flying reptile).
- ***probable* known animals** – such as giant squid that have been frequently misidentified or misperceived as 'sea monsters', or the Kenyan nandi bear, plausibly explained as a hyena, or the Sri Lankan ulama (devil bird), which is most likely a spot-bellied eagle owl.

This last category reveals the peculiar nature of cryptozoology. In the admittedly unlikely circumstance that everyone who had seen the Sri Lankan devil bird were presented with a spot-bellied eagle owl and agreed they were one and the same, then the devil bird would cease to exist for all scientific purposes, shifting without the slightest hoot of protest from cryptid to plain avian. Similarly, if the ropen were positively and unambiguously identified as, say, an exceptionally large species of bioluminescent fruit bat, the cryptid would depart the dungeons of the damned and, renamed and footnoted, enter the sacred groves of science. Cryptozoologists might take some credit – might even be *given* some credit – for contributing to the discovery of a hitherto-unidentified species. But even if on rare occasions that is what cryptozoologists *do*, is that their real function?

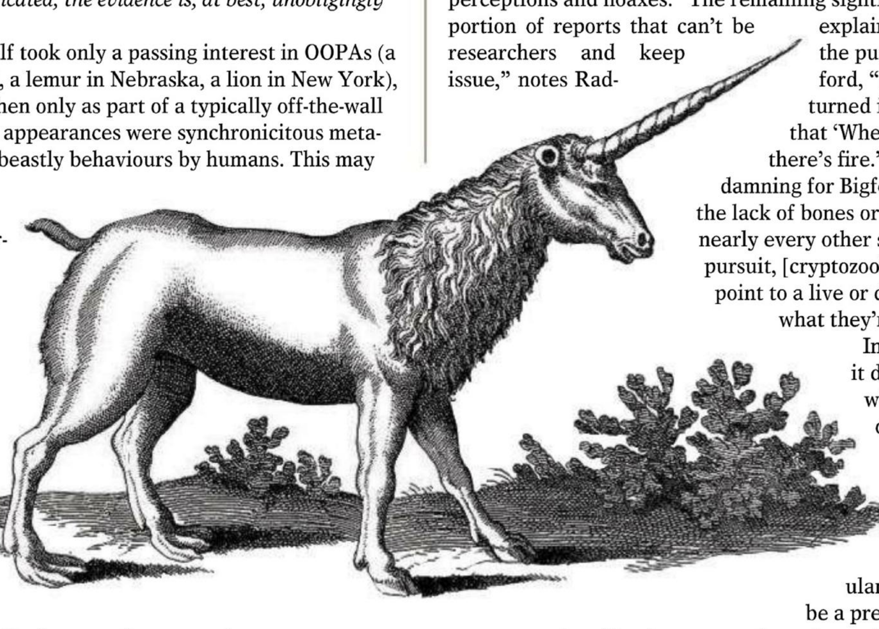
THE LESSON OF THE GREAT SILKIE

There is a creature in northern Celtic folklore called the silkie, which resembles a seal in the water but assumes human form on land. Francis James Child published the classic account, collected in the Orkneys, as his Ballad No 113, *The Great Silkie of Sule Skerrie*. For its own reasons, the folk song reverses actual perception: anyone who, from above, has seen a monk seal swimming by would at first glance take it for a human doing the side-stroke. Whereas a seal on land looks remarkably like, well, a seal. This marine mammal is not in itself a shape-shifter, but in human perception it is, and as such – as well as through its amphibious habits – it is a liminal creature, in, but not quite of, two distinct realms of normality.

Liminality is normality in the foggy realms of forteana. As folklorist Bob Trubshaw has observed:

"The uncanny comprises entities which are 'existentially' liminal – either out of place or 'out of time'. Fairies are always about to disappear forever – but have never quite gone. Aliens are considered (at least by some) to be imminent arrivals – but seem never to arrive. Ghosts are 'busted' or more subtly 'moved on' by psychics – but ghost bus tours never seem to be short of haunted locations. Cryptozoologists are always planning to get the photograph which proves such-and-such an animal is really out there, or some scatalogical evidence with incontrovertible DNA. But while the trips get more and more sophisticated, the evidence is, at best, unobligingly ambiguous."[2]

Charles Fort himself took only a passing interest in OOPAs (a gorilla in Long Island, a lemur in Nebraska, a lion in New York), in *Wild Talents*, and then only as part of a typically off-the-wall hypothesis that these appearances were synchronicitous metaphors for concurrent beastly behaviours by humans. This may explain why OOPAs still count among cryptozoological interests. A lioness lounging in Leominster is anomalous, because unexpected, but not inexplicable, in the way that timeslips are, or unidentified, as UFOs are. So, in a sense, it was necessary to invent cryptozoology and bring it into the interstitial zone of damned data. So the core of cryptozoology remains a domain of legend, rumour, anecdotal reports, contentious photographs, and other ambiguous evidence.



Taxonomy, a foundation stone of scientific method, does not apply in this "ology" that includes giant hominids, humanoid monkeys and flying reptiles. Even the criteria for including a rumoured creature in a list of cryptids are fuzzy. Take the setontot, first heard of in 2006 in a Bernama news agency report from Indonesia. In this, "local biodiversity and environment expert" Vincent Chow mentioned the creature, which (he said) features in the lore of some of the Orang Asli people who live in the Endau-Rompin National Park, Malaysia. A blog entry tells us:

"The setontot is a ground-dwelling and slow-moving creature rumoured to exist in the dense jungles of Malaysia. According to local legend, the setontot is a malicious forest creature, something like a bad spirit, around two metres [6ft 7in] tall that camouflages itself so as to leap out on its victims. Because of this, there is no conclusive description for the animal, which is probably a fabrication to deter native children from entering the dangerous, dense forests. Consequently, the setontot is invariably resigned to the dubious category of cryptid."[3]

You'd think this was, indeed, the very stuff of cryptozoology, but the Wikipedia list of cryptids calls it "discredited", along with the Beast of Busco (dinosaur from Indiana) and the cherufe of Chile, among others.

One can see why the cherufe might not tempt even cryptozoologists on an exotic holiday. A dragon-like hominid, or giant snake according to the original Mapuche myth, composed of rock and magma, it dwells inside volcanoes, and for propitiation prefers virgins (female). In other words it's 'impossible' by any criteria, even Fort's – a mythic creature, akin to dragons, gryphons and the phœnix. But why heave the setontot, the matter of *current* and therefore investigable legend, beyond the curtilage of a subject already on the fringes of credibility, while retaining the hardly more substantial, or substantiated, mokèlé-mbèmbé or Loch Ness monster among the ranks of respectable cryptids? If cryptozoologists can't speak Malay or Orang Asli, they could at least make intelligent enquiry among qualified anthropologists...

FACTS SHOULD NOT CONFUSE

For these and other reasons, cryptozoa get short shrift from hardline 'skeptics'. Surveying a half-century of Bigfoot research, Ben Radford[4] sifts the nature of the evidence that's accumulated – eyewitness sightings, footprints, recordings, samples of hair – and finds it distinctly wanting. One of the more startling facts to emerge from his article is that even leading cryptozoologists ascribe 70–80 per cent of Bigfoot sightings to misperceptions and hoaxes. "The remaining sightings, that small portion of reports that can't be explained away, intrigue researchers and keep the pursuit active. The issue," notes Radford, "is then essentially turned into the claim that 'Where there's smoke there's fire.'" Perhaps most damning for Bigfoot's existence is the lack of bones or bodies: "unlike nearly every other serious 'scientific' pursuit, [cryptozoologists] can't point to a live or dead sample of what they're studying."

In a sense, however, it doesn't matter whether Bigfoot or any other of these creatures has a palpable existence or not. As noted, if the Sri Lankan ulama turns out to be a previously-unknown owl, or Nessie no more than a legend or a few large logs, cryptozoologists will simply concentrate their energies elsewhere. The purpose of cryptozoology, like that of ghost-hunting or ufology or catalogues of spontaneous human combustion or any other field of fortean enquiry, is not to *find out* anything concrete about such liminal entities, but to enquire after them and continue speculation about them and, by so doing, keep them 'alive': in other words, to maintain and preserve their liminality. The condition can be a trap, a state of enchantment, which may explain why cryptozoologists seem so rarely to engage with anthropologists. It can also be unrecognised, which is perhaps why cryptozoologists continue to look for 'real' hidden animals, rather than studying the dynamics behind the tales attaching to them.

On the other hand, we should be grateful for these twilit creatures and those who keep them sufficiently illuminated for us to glimpse. Cryptids challenge the received order of things, and keep the imagination alert and fecund: central, subversive drives underlying Fort's work. And let us not forget the wild, gentle unicorn. This creature's ferocity, grace, purity, *and elusiveness* captured the European imagination for five centuries and more. Does anyone apart from James Randi seriously think that unicorns don't exist? Of course they do. We should know: we invented them.

NOTES

[1] Readers may, with some justice, snort at citing such a source. It is, however, easily accessible (unlike other such lists), and gives a fair sample of what cryptozoologists include among their interests. It was also where we first came across the mysterious setontot, on which more below.

[2] Bob Trubshaw: *Creating the Paranormal*, Heart of Albion 2012, p44; PDF only, downloadable from www.hoap.co.uk.

[3] http://bit.ly/K1HRXf (iejal.blogspot.co.uk).

[4] Ben Radford: "Bigfoot at 50 Evaluating a Half-Century of Bigfoot Evidence", *Skeptical Inquirer* Vol 26 No 2, March/April 2002. Online at http://bit.ly/J4wE7l (www.csicop.org).

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Laughter and spleen

SIMON WILSON examines the melancholy of 'The English Malady', which afflicted the nation during the 18th century.

SIMON WILSON is a writer, researcher and English teacher. He is a frequent *FT* contributor, and is currently based in Munich, where he lives with Lise.

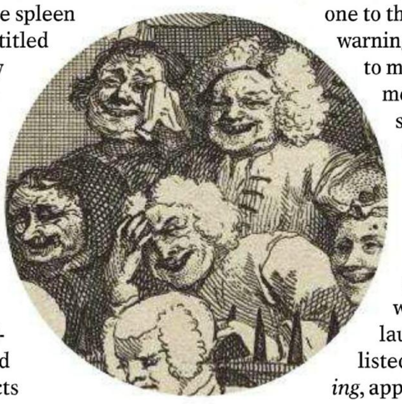
The English pride themselves on their sense of humour. When they choose to look abroad, to Europe for instance, they may concede that other countries have better climates, food or public transport. But a better sense of humour? Never.

It comes as some surprise, then, that in the 18th century the English were famous for being a nation of dull, depressed melancholics, inhabiting a miasma of sadness, anxiety and despair. Or that they themselves believed that their malaise was so severe that it threatened the very future of English society.

The English were victims of the spleen. This was the popular name for what the 17th century had called melancholy and what we might call depression. Until very recently, the spleen had been regarded as the seat of all melancholic ailments. Doctors, still under the sway of Galenic humoral theories of disease, explained that the organ could become congested with black bile and other heavy impurities, dragging the whole system down into a spiral of leaden sadness and despair against which the individual was powerless. A 1586 treatise described how the brain could then become deranged with "monstrous fictions" as "darkness and cloudes of melancholie vapours" rose from the clogged spleen.[1]

By the 18th century, doctors no longer held the spleen to be the source of this debilitating malady, believing it instead to be a nervous disorder. Its victims, however, were still described as suffering from an illness called "the spleen".[2]

At home and abroad, it was a generally agreed fact that the spleen had reached epidemic proportions in England. In 1690, the statesman Sir William Temple wrote: "Our country must be confess'd to be what a great foreign physician called it, the region of the Spleen."[3] The Scottish physician George Cheyne agreed, and when, in 1733, he published a book on the spleen and other nervous ailments, he titled it simply *The English Malady*. By the end of the 18th century, the Académie française had even officially adopted "spleen" into the French language as a term for a "maladie hypochondriaque proper aux Anglais".[4]



Cheyne explained why the illness was so dangerously widespread in England: the sedentary life and rich food enjoyed by the nation's wealthier subjects weakened their systems. Add to this an unhealthy climate and unhygienic, populous cities, and the spleen was almost inevitable.[5]

So endemic to England was the spleen that it was believed to pose a threat to the body politic. As late as 1807, the naval physician Thomas Trotter warned that the prevalence of nervous disorder in England left the country vulnerable to fitter, stronger and more determined invaders.[6]

There was, however, one obvious and inexpensive remedy for the terrible depressions of the English: a good belly laugh. Laughter dispelled the phantoms of the mind and shook the body out of its despondent lethargy. Thus Jonathan Swift, author of *Gulliver's Travels*, wrote that laughter was "sovereign against the spleen". Hence also the cheap humorous pamphlets published throughout the country, with titles such as *The cure for the spleen: or, kill care and laugh* (1769) or *A new cure for the spleen: being a collection of advertisements, humorous, numerous, curious, farcical, satirical, entertaining, and diverting* (1778).

But if jokes, skits, farce and satire were more common in England than elsewhere, that was no proof of the superior sense of humour of the English. Quite the opposite: their prevalence was testimony to the nation's terrible melancholy.

But, for the anxious English of the 18th century, the dangers did not end there. Laughter, apparently so health-giving, could equally be a sure sign that the spleen-sufferer's melancholy had flipped over to mania. The close relation of melancholy to mania had long been generally accepted. In the 17th century, the eminent physician Thomas Willis established that depression and frenzy could alternate, switching from one to the other suddenly and without warning. Thus the spleen was as likely to manifest in manic episodes as in melancholy. If melancholy meant succumbing to the dead weight of an immobile body, in mania the patient was helplessly carried away by an uncontrollably convulsive organism, all madly twitching nerves and frenzied gestures. Not infrequently, he was trapped in a transport of laughter. Cheyne's *English Malady* listed "unaccountable Fits of *Laughing*, apparent *Joy*, *Leaping* and *Dancing*" as symptoms of the spleen.[7]

Like the paralysis of the melancholic, manic laughter was also perceived as a threat to social order – excessive, violently out of control and anti-social. It tapped into a traditional aristocratic unease about laughter that reached back at least to Plato, who regarded it as a threat to the good order of his ideal state (see **FT242:57**). Its contagious nature meant that it spread swiftly: people shed all social restraint and became a roaring mob searching for more victims to laugh at. No wonder the Earl of Chesterfield, in 1748, recommended to his son that he should never, ever laugh.[8]

To many observers, then, it seemed as if 18th-century England swung helplessly between immobile melancholy and frenzied mania, each swing being accompanied by laughter. And what did all the laughing mean? Was it a cure or a symptom of the English Malady?

We may be bemused by such attitudes, but are we really so different? Sometimes it seems as if the recent history of England has been a rollercoaster ride between heights of self-congratulatory euphoria and lows of depression and frenzied violence. And all the while, the English have maintained their famous sense of humour, and laughed. It's an open question whether their laughter should be regarded as a healthy stabilising factor or as a symptom of general disequilibrium. FT

NOTES

[1] Cited in William Ober: "Eighteenth-Century Spleen", in *Psychology and Literature in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Christopher Fox, AMS Press, New York, 1987, p226.

[2] Roy Porter: *Mind-Forg'd Manacles: A history of madness in England from the Restoration to the Regency*, Penguin Books, 1990, p50.

[3] Cited in Ober, p229.

[4] Cited in Ober, p245.

[5] George Cheyne: *The English Malady, or, A Treatise of Nervous Diseases of all Kinds, as Spleen, Vapours, Lowness of Spirit, Hypochondriacal and Hysterical Distempers, etc.*, 1733, pp.*i-iii*.

[6] Thomas Trotter: *A View of the Nervous Temperament*, 1807, p.*xi*.

[7] Cheyne, p199.

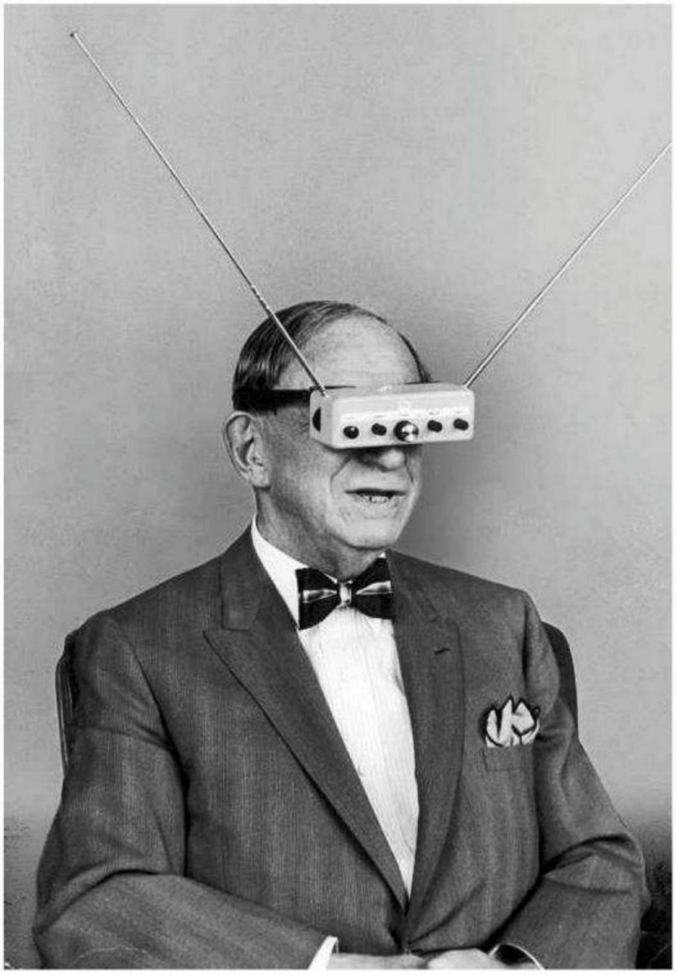
[8] Richard Blackmore: *Essays Upon Several Subjects*, vol.2, 1717, p167.

See also **FT251:58–59** for a uniquely German ailment.

Gernsback's sound and vision

Golden Age science fiction magazine editor Hugo Gernsback was also a pioneer in the early days of television and a technological visionary, explains **BRIAN J ROBB**.

BRIAN J ROBB is the author of *Counterfeit Worlds: Philip K. Dick on Film*; *Screams & Nightmares: The Films of Wes Craven* and *Timeless Adventures: How Doctor Who Conquered TV.*



ABOVE: Hugo Gernsback with a mock-up version of his Teleyeglasses.

GETTY IMAGES / TIME & LIFE PICTURES / ALFRED EISENSTAEDT

> **"The inventor frequently dies of a broken heart"**

If he's remembered at all, Hugo Gernsback is celebrated as the publisher and editor of *Amazing Stories*, the first magazine dedicated to science fiction, and as one of the founding fathers of SF fandom. However, he had another – possibly more important – role as a television pioneer and a propagandist for the future he foresaw.

Born in Luxembourg City in 1884, Gernsback (originally Gernsbacher) emigrated to the United States in 1905, aged 21, where he rapidly became caught up in the emerging new technology of radio. Fascinated by electricity from an early age, he'd studied electrical engineering and built his own batteries. After coming to America, he found it difficult to locate suitable electronic parts for his radio experiments, so set up a company to import them from Europe.

This practical experimenting grew out of his fantasy-driven vision of the future, which he traced back to a childhood reading of Percival Lowell's *Mars as the Abode of Life*, in which the author claimed there were artificial canals on Mars.

Amazing Stories (first published in 1926) grew out of Gernsback's Experimenter Publishing empire, mostly made up of scientific magazines concerned with electronics and, especially, radio. The early 20th century was a time of huge technological excitement and change, driven by lone, maverick inventors. His magazines celebrated this atmosphere of innovation, and benefited from it by carrying huge numbers of lucrative adverts. This income blossomed even more after the official licensing of radio, making the promotion of the newly emerging stations legitimate.

Launching the era of pulp adventure fiction inspired by these new developments in technology, *Amazing Stories* put readers in touch with one another through publishing their full addresses, leading to the tentative beginnings of organised fandom. He coined a term for these new stories that reflected the technological upheaval of the time: 'scientifiction', soon taken up simply as 'science fiction'.

The first issue of *Amazing Stories* featured works by HG Wells, Jules Verne and Edgar Rice Burroughs, but the magazine would soon become home to a host of new American speculative fiction authors. Gernsback's name continues to adorn the annual science fiction awards, the Hugos, presented every year since 1955 at the World Science Fiction Convention.

His first magazines, though, were not SF publications. *Modern Electronics* was launched in 1908. *Electrical Experimenter* grew out of his company's catalogue and followed in 1913, with *Radio News* coming in 1919, aimed at amateurs attracted to the newly emerging radio hobby. The title put Gernsback in contact with other scientists and experimenters, such as Thomas Edison and Nikola Tesla (who published articles in *Electical Experimenter*). Other magazines followed, but Gernsback took his involvement one step further by setting up WRNY, the first commercial radio station in the New York area, broadcasting from a new high-tech studio located on the 18th floor of the Roosevelt Hotel from June 1925. Radio was all very well, but given his interest in science fiction and the promise of new technology, he envisaged a further development: radio with pictures.

Television was discussed long before it was ever practical. Ideas about the long-distance transmission of images accompanied the invention of the movies and the telephone in the previous century. One of the first concepts – the telephonoscope – was outlined as far back as 1878 and appeared in an early French proto-SF novel, *The Twentieth Century: The Electrical Life*, by Albert Rodia in 1890. Between the first ideas of television (which literally means 'far sight' or 'viewing at a distance') and the first practical demonstrations, almost half a century would elapse.

Gernsback first expressed his interest in 'wireless with pictures' in the December 1909 issue of *Modern Electrics*, seemingly coining the word 'television' in the article 'Television and the Telephot' (*sic*). He never claimed to have invented the word himself, but he closely followed the development of the technology.

In May 1918, he had written of "inventions which, although not yet existent, we may take for granted" in a feature entitled "Television, or Seeing at a Distance". "Schemes on television are not new," he wrote in the July 1922 issue of *Science and Invention* (the renamed *Electrical Experimenter*). "Inventors have busied themselves for several generations with it, but so far nothing of note has been produced."

By January 1925, mechanical television was being developed, with the first practical demonstration anywhere in the world conducted by Scotsman John Logie Baird. Baird had combined a Nipkow disc for scanning images, first developed by German student Paul Gottlieb Nipkow in 1884, with a selenium light-sensitive sensor that produced transmittable electric pulses (through a photo-electric cell). With this primitive set-up – his first Nipkow disc was made from an old hat box lid, while other elements included a biscuit tin and a knitting needle – Baird made the first public demonstration of transmitted moving images (in crude 30–50 lines of resolution, just about enough to discern a human face). Baird would go on to create other breakthroughs – including early colour TV, live transmission of sporting events, video recording and radar – but would lose out on the future of television which became electronic following Marconi's demonstrations to the BBC in the 1930s.

Gernsback had used WRNY as a kind of laboratory for innovation, trying out ideas practically that he'd often outlined in theory in his magazines. By August 1928, he had embarked upon experimental television transmissions from his radio station in association with the eccentric Charles Francis Jenkins (who'd previously claimed to have invented motion pictures, only for Edison to 'steal' his working model). Jenkins's crude Radiovisor receiver kit was sold through ads in Gernsback's magazines. Unfortunately, the technology was extremely limited and was only able to transmit image and sound separately, making for a less than satisfactory viewing experience. The system was worse than Baird's home-made mechanical lash-up, transmitting a 48-line image that was around 1½ inches square. This low-resolution picture was broadcast on the 5kHz audio bandwidth, similar to that of a modern AM radio station. Announced in April and starting in August 1928, WRNY was, however, the first experimental television station in the world to present a series of scheduled programmes. Gernsback estimated that these crude pictures could be seen by the 2,000 or so viewers in the New York area who'd purchased Jenkins's kit-built receivers.

These expensive experiments in television contributed heavily to the bankruptcy of the Experimenter Publishing Company in 1929, a period that saw Gernsback lose control of his magazines but briefly retain his pioneering radio and television station. He was soon back in action, though, replacing *Amazing Stories* with *Science Wonder Stories* and launching *Television News* in March 1931 to continue his explorations of seeing at a distance. That debut issue contained features on the work of Philo T Farnsworth and Vladimir K Zworykin, Gernsback's successors as American television's foremost experimenters.

Gernsback saw himself as something of an unsung hero, a lone pioneer who lost out to bigger, better-financed interests. "The inventor," he wrote in *Science and Invention* magazine in July 1922, "who as a rule is poor or without means tries to interest someone in his invention, but nine times out of 10 he does not succeed. Often he does not have the money to develop the invention himself and frequently he dies of a broken heart, for the reason that he has not been able to realize the fruits of his labour. In that case, the world has lost a man who might have enriched it by untold thousands."

Ahead of his time in his experiments in television, Gernsback was such a visionary that he had 80 different patents to his name when he died in 1967, aged 83. He predicted there would one day be an undersea tunnel from New York to France (through the core of the planet), that radium could be used to revive the dead, that people would travel city streets on tele-motor-coasters, personal powered skates, and that readers would be able to print 'instant newspapers' at home (his concept of 'personalised news' has been realised by Facebook).

Perhaps his most bizarre idea was for a personal television viewer in the form of extravagant goggles. People today watch TV on mobile phones or tablet computers during the evening commute, but his notion involved wrap-around eyepieces called Teleyeglasses. He was even photographed wearing a mock-up, non-functioning set in 1963 for *TIME* magazine, four years before his death. It's good to know that he was still pursuing his quest for innovation until the very end.

When he began his experiments with television back in the 1920s, it had been a truly fortean notion – one for which the technology that could make the concept a reality didn't even exist. But Gernsback had a fortean frame of mind, envisioning a future for mankind that he did much to propagate through his technology and science fiction magazines. He saw the new technological future clearly and did more than most to make it happen. With his interests in electronics, radio and the nascent technology of television, Hugo Gernsback was a true visionary populist who combined his practical experience with the imaginative leaps of science fiction. His magazines made predictions of progress – prophecies, almost – about strange inventions like flying cars (well, we still don't have those!), atomic and solar power, portable music players and radar. His science fiction explored space travel, alien life, other worlds and teleportation. In combining these approaches, he probably did more than anyone else to promote the possibilities of emergent technologies. Through both fact and fiction he raised public awareness of the amazing future that seemingly awaited mankind. FT

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SHORT WAVE AND TELEVISION
January
See Page 530
25¢

ABOVE: Examples of Hugo Gernsback's electronics, radio and television magazines. (He may even have coined the word 'television'.) He began publishing fiction as a lure to get young people interested in science and technology.

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More tales of the unexpected...

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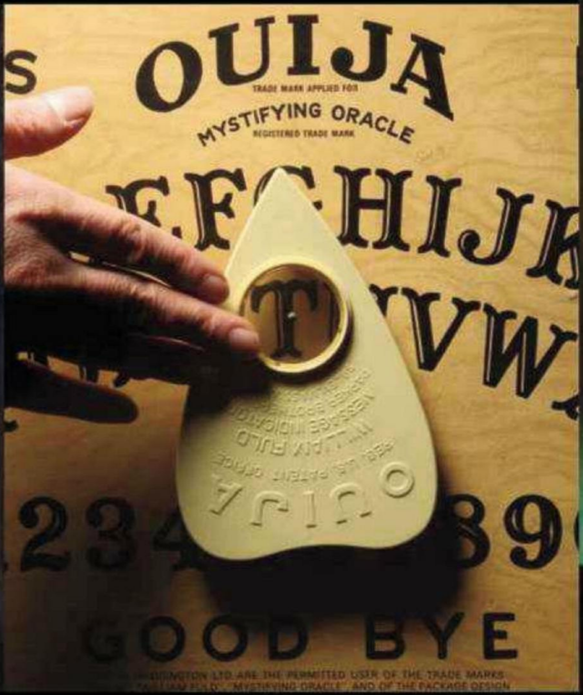
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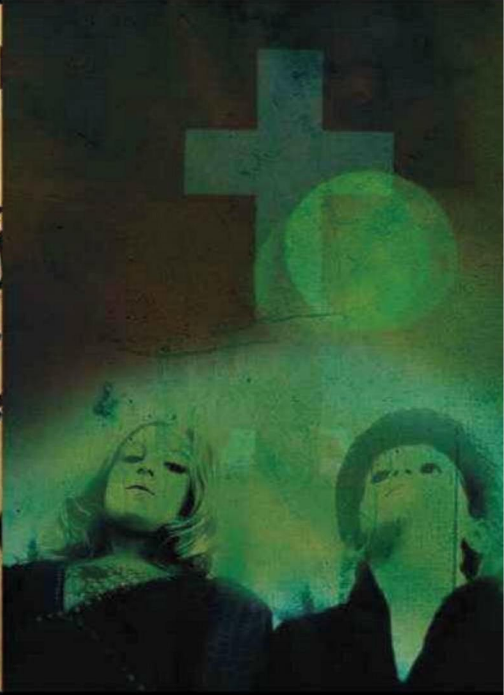

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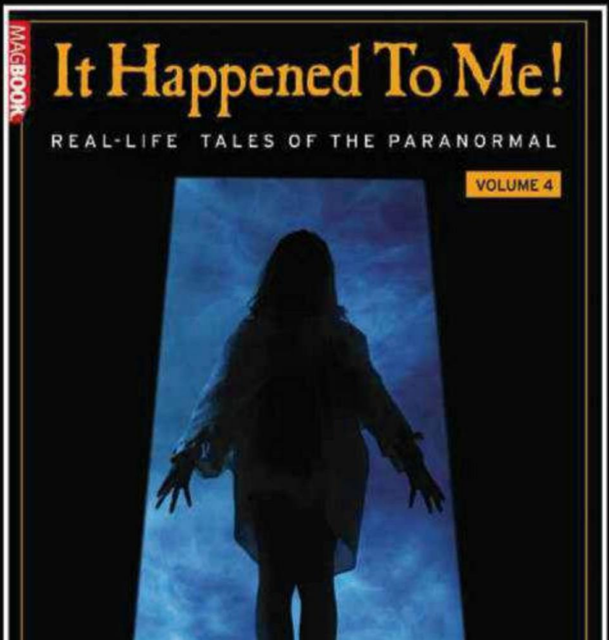
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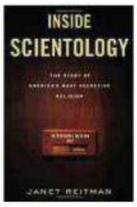
The Old Man and the Sea Org

Five years of research into the church of Scientology has resulted in a vivid picture of a secretive and authoritarian organisation, with billion-year contracts for the elite



Inside Scientology

The Story of America's Most Secretive Religion

Janet Reitman

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt 2011
Hb, 444pp, notes, bib, ind, $28.00/£17.99, ISBN 9780618883028
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £17.99

It's important to distinguish between the religion of Scientology and the Church of Scientology as an organisation. Because of what they describe as its authoritarian regime, thousands of members have left the Church, while still continuing to practise the religion. These 'Freezoners' are effectively a Protestant reformation in the religion of Scientology, outside the Church.

Some books by former Scientologists – particularly *Counterfeit Dreams* (2010), by Jefferson Hawkins, who ran Scientology's publications for many years – have been excellent. But the Church of Scientology is quick to discount their testimony as biased and untrue; it regards anyone who leaves the Church as its enemy.

Janet Reitman is a journalist, not a former member. *Inside Scientology* is the result of five years' intensive research on the Church. She's consulted accounts by ex-members, journalists and scholars, as well as police and court files and a wealth of the Church's own material, but the great strength of this book is its use of information from her interviews and correspondence with around 100 former and current members; the 33 pages of detailed source notes attest to the care she took to produce such a thorough study.

Founder L Ron Hubbard's undistinguished naval career, his involvement with rocket scientist Jack Parsons's Ordo Templi Orientis magick and his love of over-the-top storytelling about his exploits, real or imaginary, are well covered in the early pages. But it's once Hubbard comes up with his self-improvement system of Dianetics, then develops it into a religion, that Reitman's account begins to excel.

Over the years, the Church assumed more control over individual churches or orgs, which recruit members and sell them auditing, through the Sea Org, the full-time clergy and managerial elite of the Church who sign billion-year contracts, and above them the Commodore's Messenger Organisation, a teenage cadre fiercely loyal to Hubbard (and now to David Miscavige), who must be addressed as Sir, whatever their sex, by even the most senior members of the Church.

Nearly two-thirds of the book is post-Hubbard, a valuable updating of recent history. Miscavige was a Messenger; his takeover of the corporate structure of the Church aged 25, after Hubbard's death in 1986, and the way he purged senior members to establish an iron grip of control, is told in detail. Hubbard had a volatile personality; Miscavige, from this account and others, seems to have followed in his master's footsteps.

Reitman describes the years-long war of attrition through which the Church ground down the Internal Revenue Service in the USA before finally gaining tax exemption as a religion in 1993. The Church was let off nearly $1 billion in unpaid back taxes, and numerous other penalties and audits. "In exchange for all of this, Scientology agreed to drop the thousands of lawsuits it had brought against the IRS and its officials."

> **"a senior member was separated from her husband and eventually forced to divorce him"**

She spends over 70 pages on the story of Lisa McPherson, who died of neglect while in the Church's 'care' in 1995 – and on the cover-up, the destruction of evidence and the millions of dollars the Church spent defending itself before settling with the family in 2004 for an undisclosed amount estimated at $20 million.

More than probably any other religion, Scientology looks after its famous members. Reitman describes what she calls "the celebrity strategy", the wooing and parading of actors and musicians. Tom Cruise is given VIP quarters to stay in when he visits the Int [International] Base in California. The Church apparently spent millions of dollars landscaping the property and building a tennis court for him.

The Int Base or Gold Base is the home of several core organisations at the heart of the Church. The Sea Org staff who work there often do 15-hour days, seven days a week, for a $50 weekly salary – and are screamed at or punished if the slightest thing goes wrong.

The 700-acre site, until recently kept secret even from most Scientologists, has razor-topped fences, CCTV and infra-red cameras, lookout posts and floodlights; staff working there are not allowed mobile phones. Reitman tells the story of a senior member there who was separated from her husband for over two years while he was put through the Church's 'rehabilitation'/punishment routine, and was eventually forced to divorce him. The Church strenuously denies abuse; Reitman triple-checked her sources' allegations against each other before she used them.

The level of detail from many different voices makes this book essential reading. Reitman is careful to include interviews with young people who have grown up in the religion and see it as a force for good, but most of her book documents in chilling detail the abuses suffered by many members.

A surprising omission is any mention of Heber Jentzsch, president of the Church since 1982. There is widespread concern that 76-year-old Jentzsch, widely liked inside and outside the Church, has not been heard from for several years, and is believed to be incarcerated in the Church's "rehabilitation" system.

Perhaps the greatest irony is that a movement which claims to be a self-empowering path to total freedom is so controlling, militaristic and ultimately deadening, thriving (if that is the word) on distrust, fear and degradation.

David V Barrett

Fortean Times Verdict

A COMPELLING ACCOUNT OF A CONTROVERSIAL CHURCH **9**

WorldMags

Hello Kitty

Britian's Alien Big Cats are are still large and felid, but they're not quite so alien

BIG CATS
FACING BRITAIN'S WILD PREDATORS
RICK MINTER

Big Cats

Facing Britain's Wild Predator

Rick Minter

Whittles Publishing 2011
Pb, 214pp, illus, £18.99, ISBN 9781849950428
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £17.09

They used to be Alien Big Cats (ABCs), although author Rick Minter's point is that they're not so alien any more, and our acceptance of them as part of Britain's established natural fauna may be imminent. Britain's failure to accept there are big cats among us is a bigger mystery than the mystery big cats themselves.

Minter explains how hard it is even to photograph big cats in the wild. Most leopards you'll see in photos live in sanctuaries and are used to people. And it was only on its second Himalayan expedition, part of an effort costing as much as "a small house", that a crew recently managed to shoot the first ever footage of snow leopards in a genuinely wild environment.

Never mind the photos, there's plenty of other evidence. Big cat poo apparently isn't that hard to find in the British wilderness, and there are numerous signs of cat kills and traces of their meticulous dismemberment and fussy eating of deer and sheep carcases.

But *Facing Big Cats* isn't just about cats, it's about how we would deal with an official admission that big cats are out there. Minter examines the implications of British big cats for conservation (his day job), agriculture and other policy areas.

Particularly striking among the numerous colour photos is the one showing Fairfax, a black domestic cat 'from feral stock', sitting on an antique writing desk, his tail and paws protruding over both ends. Fairfax measured four feet (1.2m) from head to tail.

While feral moggies could somehow be reaching gigantic proportions, Minter suggests any next generation black leopards in Britain could be getting smaller. He explains that the "open savannah" leopards 'popular in zoos' tend to be the bigger ones, while "wild tropical leopards from Asia are often small animals… under selective pressure to be small", some only 70cm [28 in] long, about right for the "large Labrador-sized" big cat witnesses usually describe.

Minter doesn't just quote Britain's big cat experts, some – such as Chris Moiser, the CFZ's Jonathan McGowan, *Big Cats in Britain*'s Mark Fraser – familiar to *FT* readers; he takes the brave step of giving them two or three pages each to have their say, which works well.

Facing Big Cats is beautifully written with much love for the subject and lots of 'Wow! I never knew that' surprises. Minter notes how Britain's otter population crashed almost to extinction in the early 1980s. After that, people reporting otter sightings to the wildlife authorities tended to be ignored, until they gave up reporting otter sightings altogether. Years later, surprised conservation managers announced otter numbers had 'suddenly' recovered. A similar phenomenon may be at work with big cats.

There's no index, but the layout and organisation of the coloured-ink sub-headings, checklists and bullet points means you hardly need one, and make this book ideal for 'dipping' into.

Matt Salusbury

Fortean Times Verdict

ALL BOOKS ON MYSTERY ANIMALS SHOULD BE LIKE THIS 10

Legend-Tripping Online

Supernatural Folklore and the Search for Ong's Hat

Michael Kinsella

University Press of Mississippi-Jackson 2011
Hb, 211pp, illus, notes, bib, ind, $55.00, ISBN 9781604739831
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £34.00

Legend-Tripping
Online

At last! So much lip-service is paid to unexplained phenomena being a kind of modern day folklore, and yet academic studies of folk tales have seldom taken up the challenge. Professional folklorist Michael Kinsella finally does so, albeit with mixed results.

First, the bad news. This book reads like a master's thesis, which according to the introduction it almost certainly is. It's often pedantic and obscure, requiring frequent trips to Wikipedia to understand the suppositions that place belief systems in the context of Dadaism, of all things. And yet this book is a case of half the parts being greater than the whole.

Readers would be well advised to set aside the provocative, titular 'Ong's Hat', dealt with in the final chapters. It was sort of a minor movement, sort of a game, and also what's come to be trendily-named "collaborative fiction". It was also a hoax. ("Or was it?" cry the true followers.) It popped up in the 1980s on early Internet bulletin boards. Multiple documents, images, and real and false footnotes all hinted at the conspiratorial existence of at least one colony on a parallel Earth, launched by a super-secret cabal of scientist-spiritualists who had created a trailer-park community in the American ghost town of Ong's Hat – in our humble prime-reality, positioned in New Jersey.

Posts by the alleged four creators of the mystery of Ong's Hat explained the "quantum/chaos" science of their time-space portal in terms that make contactee George Adamski's explanation of 1950s Venusian spirituality straightforward by comparison. We've seen this style before, from the horrific, hoaxed *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* to the rumoured secrets of Rosicrucians and Freemasonry. Nor is it fascinating that, once the Ong founders revealed the ruse as post-post-modern art, many continue to believe. That was old news as soon as *When Prophecy Fails*, the university study of a Chicago-area contactee cult, was published in 1956.

No, what makes this book worth reading is all the material Kinsella provides as background. He argues extremely persuasively that modern ufology, spiritualism, modern tech-heavy ghost hunts and such, are examples of "legend trips" to which humanity has subscribed for millennia. Whether a séance, walk-about, dream walk, "Oz state" or high strangeness, "The performance of belief allows people to apply communally constructed interpretive frameworks tht [*sic*] encourage them to experience 'reality' according to the logic provided by the game," Kinsella writes. In other words, belief is merely a game that we have always really liked playing, preferably with others. We get excited by each other and feed each others' beliefs, constantly adding to the whole, creating our own waking reality – which wider-awake nuts-and-bolts theorists are then left to thanklessly deal with.

Kinsella points out that folklorists do not try to prove or disprove fairytales. As far as they're concerned, Cinderella's glass slipper is as real as alien abduction. They merely study narrative and belief. Despite this rather obvious point, one is forcibly reminded, for example, of the dictum of the late astronomer and pioneer UFO researcher J Allen Hynek: that we have no UFOs to study, merely reports of UFOs. We need social scientists, not more astronomers, metallurgists or biologists, to gain headway. Jacques Vallée would certainly approve.

Setting aside the superfluous Ong's Hat material, this book is a good start at studying the modern folklore passing as science that Charles Fort called "the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Jay Rath

Fortean Times Verdict

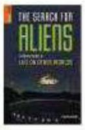
A FOLKLORIST LOOKS AT UNEXPLAINED PHENOMENA 9

The Search for Aliens

The Rough Guide to Life on Other Worlds

Piers Bizony

Rough Guides 2012
Pb, 260pp, illus, resources, ind, £11.99, ISBN 9781405383240
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £10.79



Readers of *FT* can hardly be unaware that, out there in the world beyond Grindr and the bedsit, there are two schools of thought about the existence of life on other planets. One insists that ET is already here, and manifestly busy about its enigmatic alien occasions. The other, which includes almost the entire scientific establishment, prefers to be more cautious, considering only painstakingly gathered hard evidence, and is not yet ready to make any definitive pronouncement.

Piers Bizony concentrates on the latter approach: UFOs (crashed or cruising) and abductions are covered in about a dozen pages, along with several references in the resources section. This makes sense insofar as any author has to exercise economies, and Bizony doesn't have the space that has been made available to, say, the incomparable Stephen J Dick (*The Biological Universe*, *Life on Other Worlds*, *The Living Universe*). But there are about 75 pages about life, or not, on Mars, and some of those might have been better spent dealing – however tacitly, however much in passing – with some of the more illogical claims and inferences of the UFO/ET brigade.

On top of which, Bizony hasn't worked terribly hard to find deflations of, for instance, alien abductions. His section on the late John Mack would make little sense to anyone unfamiliar with the man's work and history. Then he lands, like any tired old skeptibunker bluebottle, on sleep paralysis and a 1994 paper by Sue Blackmore to account for abductions. Jesus wept. Some of the most diehard disbelievers in the abduction mythos have moved on a bit from that in the last two decades. Bizony would have been better advised to leave ufology's loopinesses altogether to one side, dealing with them by implication rather than head-on.

It's perhaps not Bizony's fault that where he says "she" he also means "he", which gains nothing over the traditional reverse usage: never encountered plurals, and "they", you lot? Or do the politically correct have a fetish about ladies being on top? Otherwise, this isn't at all a bad crack of this particular whip. The techniques of detecting extra-solar planets are lucidly explained, and the deficiencies of the plaques attached to the Voyager and Pioneer spacecraft are tactfully exposed. The dilemmas we'd face on making contact with ETIs are clearly laid out. There's a good account of the origins of life on Earth, and a fair warning that, the vagaries of evolution being what they are, intelligent alien life may not have anything in common with us beyond a general morphology – and perhaps not even that. There's no reason really to suppose that alien life anywhere else will have gone beyond the condition of contented bacteria. We're even given fair warning that looking for artificial radio signals from the stars may be a red herring.

One would have liked to know more about the conditions in which life might arise. Ufological optimists seem to infer from the existence on Earth of radiation-resistant bacteria, cryptic creatures in super-heated deep-sea trenches, etc, that life can arise almost anywhere. The questions are (a) whether the first terrestrial life arose in such conditions (and here I trust Bizony's homework when he says no one really knows) and (b) whether evolution 'upwards' to intelligent life is inevitable. The answer to (b) is No, but Bizony doesn't quite say so. When he talks about evolution, he often represents the common but incorrect impression that plants and animals 'choose' new forms, not have them forced upon them.

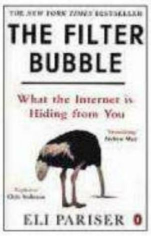
But. This is a rough guide, and as such does a fair job on the whole. As such, it deserves a high score, despite the groans above.

Peter Brookesmith

Fortean Times Verdict
COMPREHENSIVE IF CONVENTIONAL SURVEY OF THE HUNT FOR ALIEN LIFE **8**

Web of deceit

The personalised echo chamber limits our exposure to opposing views


THE NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER
THE FILTER BUBBLE
What the Internet is Hiding from You
ELI PARISER

The Filter Bubble

What the Internet is Hiding from You

Eli Pariser

Penguin Books 2011
Pb, 294pp, notes, ind, £9.99, ISBN 9780241954522
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £9.49

Contrast the hippie adage that "Information wants to be free" with MetaFilter poster Andrew Lewis's view that "If you're not paying for something, you're not the customer – you're the product being sold". Welcome to the world of collaborative filtering, where your likes and dislikes, political views and circle of friends are currency.

Having worked out who we are, according to Google's Eric Schmidt, the next stage is for the company to tell people what to do. Filtering results helps us avoid being overwhelmed by a tsunami of irrelevant information. However, there is no 'standard' Google: each search determines the content we view the next time we log on, creating "a kind of invisible autopropaganda". Personalised filters, says Pariser, skew the cognitive balance between strengthening our existing ideas and acquiring new ones, causing an "identity loop" and making us over-confident within our mental frameworks. A 9/11 conspiracy theorist, for example, may get many links to *Loose Change* but none to the *Popular Mechanics* article demolishing its thesis. And confirmation bias is particularly strong among more educated media consumers.

The shift to personalisation is largely invisible to users: we can't grasp the unknown unknowns, so are unaware of what we're not being told. The researchers behind the Ngram Viewer, "a quantitative approach to the humanities", found that "humanity is forgetting its past faster with each passing year". Pariser notes Yahoo!'s melding of personalisation with an editorial curation process that recognises that some things are *important*. He cites Walter Lippmann's *Liberty and the News* (just read it!) in his call for a new generation of curators – and users – who will insist that monetisation is not the only consideration. He proposes a prize for systems that hold readers' attention while introducing them to new topics and ideas.

And if you worry about the amount of data about you that is already available, consider the future. Using the MORIS iPhone facial recognition app, police can identify a suspect in seconds. William Gibson said: "The future is here – it's just not very evenly distributed". Yet.

Val Stevenson

Fortean Times Verdict
LUCID RIPOSTE TO THE GRAND IDEAS OF THE TECHNO-UTOPIANS **9**

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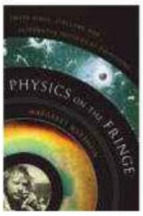
Untethered physics

A sympathetic attempt to understand what drives outsider amateur cosmologists to swim against scientific orthodoxy



Physics on the Fringe

Smoke Rings, Circlons, and Alternative Theories of Everything

Margaret Wertheim

Walker & Company 2011

Hb, 323pp, notes, bib, ind, $27.00, ISBN 9780802715135

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKCLUB PRICE £16.99

I'm not smarter than Einstein; neither are you. It doesn't follow that his ideas are Holy Writ, but if, one day, Einstein is found in error, a physicist who is immersed in knowledge so specialised, complex and arcane as to be inaccessible to the rest of us will be the one who determines as much.

Most observers would not quarrel with that banal assessment. Australian-American science journalist Margaret Wertheim's engaging *Physics on the Fringe*, however, concerns itself with those who are proudly uncounted among the just-mentioned 'most'. Her subject is those amateur cosmologists certain they are smarter than Einstein and, indeed, all the physicists of the last century. The polite word for them is 'outsiders': the rude one is 'cranks'.

If the late Martin Gardner had written this book, ridicule would have dripped from every page. Happily, Wertheim's is not that kind of book. If not exactly a defence of outsiders, it is a sympathetic attempt to understand what drives them, even as the progress of science produces data and theories barely comprehensible to the most committed lay student.

As science becomes ever less a democratic enterprise, some outsiders think that's because scientists have taken a dangerously wrong turn. Thus, the outsiders hope to restore a Universe whose secrets are available to any inquisitive citizen, not just to an elite which might as well consist of nonhuman intelligences.

A good part of the book is devoted to a representative outsider, Jim Carter of rural Washington State. Since 1971, he has tried to establish that, contrary to modern physical consensus (the product of advances in field theory and higher mathematics), the Universe is uncomplicated and mostly unmathematical.

In Wertheim's paraphrase of Carter's core idea, "All matter and energy are explained by the mechanics of subatomic particles, each one shaped like a tiny circle of coiled spring", which Carter calls a 'circlon'. Wertheim writes: "Everything that happens in the material world can be explained by the ways in which circlon-shaped particles interact."

This notion leads to some, um, curious conclusions, not least that matter is in a state of dizzying expansion. If you drop a stick, Carter would have science hold, gravity does not pull it to the ground; rather, the Earth rises up to the stick.

If somebody told you this, your immediate impulse would be to edge away from the crazy person. But apart from his unusual physics, Carter is no crazier than you or me. Wertheim attests to his sanity and intelligence, as well as a long life as happily married family man and successful inventor/entrepeneur.

The closest she comes to looking askance is when she allows herself to wonder where, given his energy and ingenuity, he would have gone if he'd had the benefit of a proper science education.

Beyond Carter's specific case, Wertheim surveys the state of current fringe physics, now organised – using the adjective loosely – in the Natural Philosophy Alliance. There, unorthodox voices, none in any agreement whatever except in shared eschewing of 21st-century physics, freely revise (and reduce) the Universe. Readers may think of Milton Rokeach's *The Three Christs of Ypsilanti*, which relates what happened when three schizophrenics each convinced of his Christhood were placed in one other's company.

But Wertheim admonishes those inclined to snicker to direct their gaze on string theorists, all perfectly respectable, whose unfettered imaginations conjure up visions of staggeringly weird Ultimate Realities. She says: "String cosmology is a protean field… Estimates of how many versions of the theory there are keep going up."

No wonder the string theorists at a conference Wertheim attended paid only polite attention to their ostensible colleagues, in the conviction that everybody else's opinion could only be time-wasting and baseless. Or maybe, as physicist Leonard Susskind helpfully suggests, all ideas are true – somewhere – in the universes and universes and universes of what he calls the "cosmic Landscape".

Does that mean there are places in the Cosmos where even the most outlandish crank physics rules? Wertheim doesn't raise that intriguing question, but she worries that theoretical physics is "increasingly untethered from data… losing its link to evidence… with almost every theorist proposing his or her own version of what a final theory might be."

Or put another way, who's the physics crank now?

Jerome Clark

Fortean Times Verdict

PERHAPS ALL IDEAS ARE TRUE SOMEWHERE IN THE UNIVERSES **9**

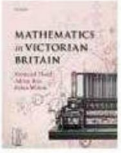
Mathematics in Victorian Britain

Ed: Raymond Flood, Adrian Rice & Robin Wilson

Oxford University Press 2011

Hb, 480pp, illus, notes, ind, £29.99, ISBN 9780199601394

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKCLUB PRICE £26.99



If, like me, you're intrigued by the juxtaposition of two such unfashionable concepts as 'mathematics' and 'Victorian Britain', you'll find something of interest in this book of 18 essays on subjects ranging from Victorian astronomy and applied mathematics to calculating engines and the role of statistics in the theory of evolution.

Lewis Carroll, under his real name of Charles Dodgson, was a mathematics tutor. Here you can read about his (sometimes amusing) work in the areas of logic, geometry and algebra. That Florence Nightingale invented an early form of 'pie chart' is a well-known piece of trivia, but it obscures the fact that she was one of the most innovative statistical pioneers of the 19th century. Charles Babbage designed sophisticated mechanical computers, but why were none ever built? The 'Boolean logic' that lies at the heart of modern computers was invented by George Boole, a religious mystic who saw digital zeros and ones as symbols of cosmic unity!

Victorian Britain was at the forefront of the Industrial Revolution, and applied mathematics played a crucial role in this with the development of subjects like thermodynamics and fluid mechanics. At the same time, the groundwork was being laid for 20th-century revolutions: Fitzgerald's work paved the way for the Theory of Relativity, while Hamilton's equations would later become an indispensable element of Quantum Physics.

For anyone with the slightest interest in the history of mathematics, this is an excellent volume for dipping into.

Andrew May

Fortean Times Verdict

INTELLECTUAL UNDERPINNINGS OF THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION **8**

ALSO RECEIVED

We leaf through a small selection of the dozens of books that have arrived at Fortean Towers in recent months...

AROUND THE OUTSIDER: ESSAYS PRESENTED TO COLIN WILSON ON THE OCCASION OF HIS 80TH BIRTHDAY

Colin Stanley (ed.)

O Books (hrpub.com) 2011
Pb, pp334, notes, index, £16.99
ISBN 9781846946684

Colin Wilson's first book – a 1956 study of existential themes in literature – was called *The Outsider*. Despite the book's initial brief, modish success, catapulting Wilson to instant if transitory fame, there was perhaps something prophetic in its very title – the rest of Wilson's long career and vast output has been largely ignored by the mainstream literary establishment. Perhaps one reason was the difficulty in neatly pigeonholing him as a writer: from studies of philosophical and religious themes in literature, he swiftly moved on to criminology, psychology, sex and the paranormal, with diversions into subjects as diverse as alcohol, music and cosmology. Monographs on figures from Rasputin to Wilhelm Reich, Jung to Ouspensky followed. Wilson also quickly crossed the divide from fact to fiction, beginning a series of novels with the existential murder thriller *Ritual in the Dark* in 1960, and from then on exploring his interests in both fictional and non-fictional works. No wonder the mainstream soon lost interest, but it's just this magpie instinct to chase themes across artificial borders that has always endeared Wilson to forteans – even if his more recent flirtation with the 'Ancient Mysteries' sub-genre has sometimes tried readers' patience.

This *festschrift* or tribute volume is made up of 23 essays by Wilson scholars and well-wishers, each focusing on a particular work from the wide Wilson œuvre; of most interest to forteans will be Stanley Krippner on *Mysteries* and *FT* regular Gary Lachman on *Poetry and Mysticism*. But there's lots more to enjoy and stimulate. Obviously partisan and, rightly, celebratory in tone, this is an illuminating look at a fascinating career. Above all, it helps one glimpse the unity of thought and intention behind the seemingly diffuse subject matter of nearly 60 years of writing.

ENCYCLOPEDIA OF THE VAMPIRE: THE LIVING DEAD IN MYTH, LEGEND AND POPULAR CULTURE

ST Joshi (ed.)

History Press (thehistorypress.co.uk) 2011
Hb, pp453, bib, index, £58.95
ISBN 9780313378331

As ST Joshi points out in his preface, despite the vampire's roots in age-old folklore, its rise to cultural pre-eminence is of surprisingly recent origin, a steadily growing and seemingly unstoppable progress from 18th-century scholarly disquisitions and Gothic literature to the media domination and teenage cults of the early 21st century. Joshi is best known for putting HP Lovecraft on the academic map, and has here assembled a team of (mostly) humanities lecturers to cast a critical eye over the ever-increasing corpus of vampire literature, television and film. There are entries on authors, series and individual works, as well as longer thematic essays on topics as diverse as "Humorous Vampire Films", "Sexuality in Vampire Fiction" and "Vampires in World Folklore". The overall emphasis, though, is firmly on the vampire as a cultural figure. The book offers a useful overview of its development, particularly over recent years with the rise of the fictional sagas offered by the likes of Anne Rice, *Buffy* and *Angel*, the *Twilight* saga etc. There are lacunæ, of course, and the value of the individual contributions varies according to author, with some offering more astute analysis than others. There's a tendency toward a rather bland style of American academese where a bit more bite (if you'll pardon the expression) wouldn't have gone amiss. And given the mass of material here, some cross-referencing would have been a big help. Nevertheless, this is a useful volume for keeping track of the fictional undead, especially in their more recent incarnations.

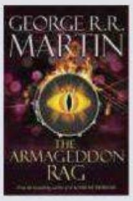
THE PARANORMAL: WHO BELIEVES, WHY THEY BELIEVE AND WHY IT MATTERS

Erich Goode

Prometheus Books (prometheusbooks.com) 2012
Pb, pp335, index, refs, illus, $19.00
ISBN 9781616144913

This is a typical 'skeptical' work, solidly written if a bit jargon-rich. Goode studies the effect of scientists labelling some people or beliefs as 'wrong', taking as a start the definition of 'paranormal' as that which is beyond (or stands outside) scientific explanation. Among the deconstructions of the 'usual suspects' (psi, UFOs, ghosts etc) are some interesting analyses (*e.g.* why some scientists believe in God, why people believe in science). So, who are these believers and why do they believe? Goode's opening questions belie their simplicity and prove very difficult to answer meaningfully. While the faith the believers invest in their beliefs is severely examined, the faith of scientists (eg. in the universality of their own proofs) is not. Goode's conclusion is that paranormal beliefs are a form of social deviance offering many rewards of a kind that a belief solely in scientific explanations cannot.

FORTEAN FICTION



The Armageddon Rag

George RR Martin

Gollancz, 2012
Hb, pp384, £18.99
ISBN 9780575096141

The Armageddon Rag is one of George RR Martin's personal favourites among his own books, though when first published, nearly 30 years ago, it rather unfairly disappeared without notice.

Sandy Blair is an underground music journalist who finds himself investigating the death of Jamie Lynch, a millionaire rock producer apparently murdered in some sort of Satanic ritual. Thinking there might be 'a story' in this, Sandy goes on a road trip to interview friends and the remaining members of Lynch's most famous band.

Murder mystery combined with occult dabbling, *Armageddon Rag* is both a pæan to rock culture and a hard look at an America in decay, with Sixties optimism replaced by Seventies cynicism and Eighties materialism. That *Rolling Stone* magazine vibe is recreated here in all of its sex-and-drugs-and-rock-and-roll glory; and yet Sandy's visits to his old friends and fellow rockers highlight how the dream has gone badly awry. It is no wonder that our hero feels lost as he travels to meet his past and instead confronts the diabolic.

Really, it's all about the Eighties: vinyl and cassettes and the rise of disco, all at the expense of rock, and most of all, of music. Real lyrics are interspersed with the imaginary and details are created worthy of the rock-obsessed super-fan. The cumulative effect is that the music side of the story feels more like Led Zeppelin than Spinal Tap... before becoming *The Twilight Zone*.

The Armageddon Rag is leagues away from mediævalist fantasyland, although there are some fan-fantasy references and some disturbing dream sequences that Ken Russell would've loved. Though quite different to Martin's Westeros, and written over a decade before, this shows a multi-talented writer at his most versatile.

Mark Yon

SEND REVIEW COPIES OF DVDS AND GAMES TO:
THE EDITOR, **FORTEAN TIMES**, DENNIS CONSUMER DIVISION,
30 CLEVELAND STREET, LONDON W1T 4JD, UK.

The Monk

Dir Dominik Moll, France/Spain 2011
On UK release from 27 April

Poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge once wrote of Matthew Lewis's 1796 Gothic novel *The Monk*, "It is a romance, which if a parent saw in the hands of a son or daughter, he might reasonably turn pale." He wasn't kidding. *The Monk* is a book of shocking excess, moving from taboo to taboo at a rate of knots. Among other things, it features blasphemy, necrophilia, Satanism, rape, murder and incest. And now, acclaimed French director Dominick Moll presents us with his new big screen adaptation.

A baby is abandoned on the steps of a 17th-century Capuchin monastery in Madrid. He has a birthmark on his shoulder, in the shape of a hand. Despite concerns that this might be the devil's mark, the monks name the boy Ambrosio and bring him up in their order. In time, he becomes a devout and revered priest. People flock to hear his sermons and the monks admire his piety and religious wisdom. But then, one day, a mysterious young burns victim joins the order (the bone-coloured mask he wears to cover his face is genuinely creepy) and, after being warned that the Devil is prowling around the monastery, Ambrosio becomes a target for Satan; and so the tempting begins.

French actor Vincent Cassell (*Black Swan* and *A Dangerous Method*) gives an absorbing performance as the tortured, tempted monk. The cinematography is great too, brilliantly contrasting the darkness of the monastery with the blinding light of the outside world. Yet the film is certainly not flawless. For a start, Ambrosio's fall from grace seems a little too quick, too sudden. And for a film based on a book which caused such gut-wrenching controversy, Moll pulls some punches here. For example, an important scene involving rape is (perhaps mercifully) sanitised; but, as a result, it loses some of its shock value. More importantly, we are perhaps less disgusted by the character than we possibly ought to be.

But it's the overall sense of doom in the midst of beauty which gives the film its lasting power. The opening scene itself throws us headlong into the abyss. Ambrosio is hearing the confession of a hideous pædophile and murderer, but we can't really tell if the monk is disgusted by the man's crimes or secretly beguiled by them. This is the power of sin: it starts slippery, interesting and quiet but ends up vile, dehumanising and grotesque.

In some ways, Moll has chosen a more subtle approach than Lewis. This might be rather jarring at first, but arguably it is this painting of sins like rape as quite gentle, even potentially acceptable, which makes this fascinating film just as disturbing, in slightly different ways, as the book on which it is based. It's a film not so much about having sympathy for the Devil, but rather sympathy for the Devil's prey.

Rev. Peter Laws

Fortean Times Verdict
GOTHIC CLASSIC TONED DOWN FOR THE CINEMA SCREEN **7**

Bad Lieutenant

Dir Abel Ferrara, US 1992
Fabulous Films, £19.99

Catching up with Abel Ferrara's film 20 years on brought back memories of my initial encounter with it two decades ago. Then, it was my spectacularly ill-considered contribution to a video shop double bill with some friends. While I suffered in silence through Steve Martin's antics in the saccharine *Father of the Bride 2* (their choice), little did my fellow viewers suspect that they'd soon be suffering the spectacle of Harvey Keitel mumbling obscenities and wanking himself off in front of a pair of teenage girls in a car. And little did I suspect that I'd soon be sitting alone, after the room swiftly emptied, trying to make some sense of a film in which much of the action was too dark to see, much of the dialogue inaudible and the plot – such as it was – incomprehensible.

This new high-definition Blu-ray restoration does away with such problems, looking crisp and sounding good; perhaps some of the almost tangible sleaze of the crappy VHS tape has been lost, but there's more than enough in the events depicted on-screen to make up for that.

Keitel plays a nameless New York cop whose life has spiralled into an out-of-control whirlpool of booze, drugs and gambling. He's the kind of guy who shows up at homicides only to steal drugs from the corpses, and whose only reaction when a nun is brutally raped in a local church is contempt for both perpetrators and victim alike. But as he goes about his daily round of snorting coke, smoking crack, jacking up heroin and tossing back bottles of vodka, something about the case starts to trouble him. And when the sister in question announces that she has forgiven the boys who attacked her, there are stirrings in the LT's befuddled brain.

Keitel's performance is unforgettable. As he stumbles from one scene to another, lumpy, dishevelled and sweating, eyes watering, jaw in a permanent coke-fuelled clench, forehead looking as if it's about to pop a vein, it's like watching someone walking into the abyss, one unsteady step at a time. Is he really bad, or simply sucking up all the evil he sees around him, becoming a living lexicon of every conceivable sin, a kind of modern scapegoat? The scene in which he confronts his own drug-and-guilt created vision of Christ, crawling on his knees and howling like a wounded beast for mercy, is almost too much – like accidentally eavesdropping on someone else's primal scream therapy.

It's all a universe away from Nicolas Cage's bravura, mannered performance in the recent Werner Herzog 'remake'; as is the film itself. Whereas the European Herzog turned in a patchily entertaining American movie, Ferrara created something which despite its very American obsessions (baseball, crime and religion) is far more European in tone; verité street scenes, unflinchingly long takes in which nothing, on the surface, happens, a narrative constantly derailed by its protagonist's chaotic trajectory. I know which version I'd take, but it has to be said (as I learned 20 years ago) that, while *Bad Lieutenant* might just be some kind of crazed masterpiece about atonement (and perhaps even redemption), it's not an easy movie to like, or even enjoy; and it certainly isn't for everyone.

The extras are a bit weak, but the rambling and sometimes bizarre director's commentary from Ferrara exerts a strange fascination of its own.

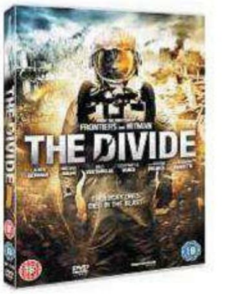
David Sutton

Fortean Times Verdict
FERRARA'S DARK NIGHT OF THE SOUL: GRUELLING STUFF **8**

The Divide

Dir Xavier Gens, US 2011
Momentum Pictures, £12.99

The Divide has lived up to its name in dividing the critics. For some, maybe, it leaves too much of a bad taste. Is it just one long, barely veiled hate piece aimed at the United States? What could be more sacrilegious and kick-in-the-nuts than a portrayal of a 9/11 firefighter (Michael Biehn) as a xenophobic homophobe, intent only on saving his own skin in a post-apocalyptic America? Or is it a deeply unsettling exploration of what happens to the human psyche when all tethers of social decency unravel and life becomes an unseemly crawl for (doomed anyway) survival?



French director Xavier Gens (*Hitman*, *Frontier(s)*) does his best to shock, with bestial humpings, opportunist whoredom, nasty alpha male square-offs, torture scenes and a frightening quota of tinned baked beans (not a freedom fry in sight) consumed in the deep basement building of a New York City apartment block. It's good to see Biehn as an unbalanced cigar-chewing, grizzled loner, now an apartment superintendent, calling the shots and showing off his acting chops. And it's when he isn't, that it all begins to go wrong, in more ways than one. Because once the film takes its eye off Biehn, the rest of the cast struggle with the wayward script; Rosanna Arquette is truly wasted, while Lauren German (no stranger to horrific entrapment: *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, *Hostel II*), from whose character viewpoint many of the film's events are seen, has a hard time asserting herself in the face of Gens's increasingly self-indulgent scenarios. It is his vision of how people would end up behaving – and for all I know it may have been derived from actual research into people under intense stress in enclosed spaces – but more of the horror is suggested than actually seen on screen. Dead bodies get hacked to bits to be disposed of in a septic tank, but we don't see the actual hacking, just the plastic-bagged bloody chunks; a digit is indeed severed in close-up with a box cutter, but what a neat cut it is; nasty, forced copulation is glimpsed through a door slit with the obligatory distressed grunting; a bit of brain matter spills on the floor. It could be argued that Gens does not actually dwell on these scenes as gratuitous torture porn, concentrating instead on the implications of the human condition in the midst of terminal social breakdown. But if so, it doesn't work.

I said at the beginning of this review that maybe the film left too much of a bad taste for some. Sometimes things that taste bad are good for you. And here's my problem with the film: nothing in its entire two-hours' running time left me as disturbed about humanity's bestial potential than did one passing scene in John Hillcoat's film adaptation of Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*. Here, father and son come upon a group of people who have taken to living out their last days in the basement underneath a house. A naked man, soiled, barely sane, urges them to join him: "You get used to it," he says. In that one line, there were more chilling implications to ponder than anything that transpires in the overheated human abattoir of *The Divide*. It's by no means a bad film, and it certainly has its unsettling moments, but that lack of a similarly resonating and lasting payoff in its conclusion did leave a bit of a bad taste in my mouth – but perhaps not of the sort Gens had intended.

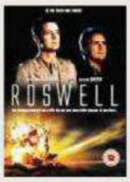
Nick Čirkovič

Fortean Times Verdict
THIS APOCALYPSE IS UNBELIEVABLY OVERHEATED **6**

SHORTS

ROSWELL

(Fabulous Films, £12.99)



This TV movie (based on the controversial Randle & Schmitt book *UFO Crash at Roswell*) was made in 1995, at the height of the *X-Files* boom in TV and movie ufology. Kyle McLachlan (*Twin Peaks*) leads a quirky cast (that includes Martin Sheen, Dwight Yoakam, Xander Berkeley and Peter MacNicol, among others) in a potted exploration of the various Roswell crash myths. Told as flashbacks sparked by an investigation by Major Jesse Marcel (McLachlan) at a 1977 military reunion, the movie plays fast and loose with what 'facts' there might have been, but all in the interest of producing engaging drama. The story merges various conflicting and changing accounts of what crashed and what might have been retrieved (including alien bodies, one alive) at Roswell in 1947, presenting a series of unreliable witnesses and stories that grew in the telling, as well as a heavy degree of mischievous misinformation (including a large infodump by Sheen's character towards the end). It's an enjoyable account of a still-contested tale that throws everything into the mix in the hope of maybe accidentally hitting the truth. Better than you might expect, *Roswell* is a good primer on the 1947 events, while the accompanying hour-long 'UFO Chronicles' documentary provides added ufological context. **Brian J Robb** **7/10**

TWO LANE BLACKTOP

(Eureka Entertainment, £19.99)

two-lane blacktop

A recognised underground classic, Monte Hellman's existential road movie has been nicely polished for this Blu-ray release. Unusually, the movie stars two musicians in the leading roles. Dennis Wilson (of Beach Boys fame) and (even odder) James Taylor play the 'mechanic' and the 'driver' (they're never named) caught up in a cross-country road race. Their antagonist is Warren Oates, a mercurial actor who refused all that Hollywood fame offered, content to follow his own star. They are all obsessional figures, set against a changing American landscape, caught up in their own limited inner worlds. Breaking their concentration is a hitch-hiker, the 'girl' (Laurie Bird). Each viewer will find something different in this movie today, but when first released in 1971 it was an expression of countercultural alienation. It still stands up, although modern audiences may have to work at appreciating the blank performances offered by the two leads and the more playful approach by Oates to 'acting'. Comprehensive extras, including a Hellman commentary and several detailed documentaries (one re-tracing the film's route across America), put the movie in context. A classic of its time that still resonates, even if you're not a petrolhead. **BJR** **8/10**

WAR OF THE DEAD

(Momentum Pictures, £12.99)

WAR OF THE DEAD

Finland, WWII: a squad of Finnish and American troops are sent on a mysterious mission to destroy a bunker in dangerous Russian-held territory and soon find themselves fighting for their lives amid hordes of reanimated soldiers. War, Nazis, zombies; what's not to like? Well, first-time Lithuanian director Marko Mäkilaakso's film is effectively one long, mildly diverting chase sequence with people shouting at each other interspersed with some slow motion to signpost Big Moments. Sadly, when the undead attacks consist either of impromptu piggybacks upon their victims or over-enthusiastic hugging, this zombie film is short on gore and a bit of a bore. **NČ** **3/10**

WorldMags

The Darkness II

PC, £34.99 PS2, XBox360 £49.99
2K Games/Digital Extremes

Knowing nothing of the original game, let alone the comic book on which both it and this sequel are based, I had no great expectations of *The Darkness II* – other than the reputation for extreme violence that preceded it.

Ten minutes in, and this lack of expectations had been replaced by a dawning feeling of active dislike; did I really want to spend the next however many hours in the company of a bunch of sweary, central casting mobsters who appeared to have escaped from an old Scorsese film? And who – or what – was this particularly potty-mouthed little imp wearing some kind of Union Jack baby-gro and bombarding me with a constant stream of invective in broad mockney? (He turns out to be a Darkling, and very helpful too.)

First impressions, however, turned out to be wrong. Yes, *The Darkness II* could be viewed as a puerile, cliché-ridden exercise that appeals to a gamer's worst instincts, but it also turns out to be a surprisingly engaging and well-told story with sufficient twists in the gameplay to keep you playing right through to the (literally) hellish dénouement.

You are Jackie Estacado, a young Mafia boss who possesses the unlikely combination of pretty-boy good looks, nice hair and the gravelly tones of a Lance Henriksen (I actually had to check it wasn't him doing the voice acting). Jackie is already a bit moody, as his girlfriend was killed in the previous game, and now some other outfit is hitting his 'family' for reasons at first unknown; turns out they're something more sinister than just rival mafiosi, and Jackie has something they want.

It's something he has inside him; a powerful force called the Darkness. I never really figured out exactly what it was, apart from being one of those typically double-edged, Faustian deals which grant you great powers but sort of hang on to your soul as collateral. Jackie has kept it under wraps for a while, but now he has no choice but to let it out again – and it's hungry!

What this all boils down to – apart from some highly scripted scenes where Jackie wrestles, rather literally, with his inner demons – is that you sprout a pair of, erm, angry tentacle-snake things (from your shoulders, I think) that enjoy nothing more than grabbing hold of your enemies, hoisting them into the air and then tearing them in half or ripping out their spines. As you can imagine, it's a messy business; along with the constant sweariness, frequent sexual references and general milieu of low-life sleazery, it explains the game's 18 rating. It also becomes a rather enjoyable activity; addictively cathartic, even, if you've had a bad week at work and can pretend it's your boss screaming like a girl for mercy as you fillet him with a mere flick of your serpentine appendage. The trouble is, you can't grab such vile miscreants until you've either stunned them (with a well-aimed tentacle bitch-slap) or pumped some lead into them from the small but deadly arsenal you're toting around. But this means using your hands too – tricky, if you find multi-tasking difficult or are less than ambidextrous. It may well be easier on a console with one of those new-fangled gamepads, but for grizzled PC veterans like me it means wielding mouse buttons and wheel while trying to get your other fingers around the Q, W, E, A, D and S keys. I got there in the end, but in the heat of battle it's easy to come unstuck and find yourself flailing around like an idiot while cackling baddies take you out in moments. It should be noted that you can grab all sorts of other things, not just people; metal poles or bits of masonry, for instance, which you can chuck a fair old distance to impale or decapitate foes before they get too close. You can even chuck your vicious Darkling sidekick at them. This is a lot of fun. But, even when you've mastered such enviable skilz, there's a further rub. The Darkness – you may have guessed this – prefers to lurk in the shadows and doesn't react well to light. Which means that if you're not careful, you can throw yourself gamely into a hail of bullets only to find your deadly tentacles shrivelling like detumescent trouser snakes in the glare of a previously unnoticed streetlight. In later levels, when enemies arrive packing mobile searchlights, this can make the already complicated business of staying alive even more daunting.

And there are no health packs or the like in this gruesome game, so to keep up your strength you'll need to ensure a constant diet of hearts, either snatched from fresh corpses or plucked, still beating, from living bodies hoisted aloft and swiftly despatched via a pleasing variety of special 'executions' that can gain you extra health, ammo or dark essence. This, in turn, can be expended on all kinds of special powers, like unleashing supernatural swarms or creating mini-black holes.

All of which adds up to some fun, if often highly frenetic, combat, that gets particularly tough on some of the 'boss' levels; but combined with a wide range of settings – a brothel, a cemetery, an abandoned fairground, and a loony bin to which you find yourself constantly returning, raising questions about Jackie's sanity – keeps interest at a high level throughout.

The graphic-novel feel – which extends to the in-game graphics themselves, all rendered with an attractively stylised pen-and-ink overlay – and tortured-hero-with-dead-girlfriend shtick can't help but recall *Max Payne*. While Jackie's adventures aren't in the same game-changing league, *The Darkness II* compensates by offering up squelchy, bleeding chunks of sheer visceral enjoyment for those of a violent, or even just tempotrarily peevish, disposition.

I, for one, found it was over all too soon and wanted more, although others will find the online co-op and 'vendetta' options some compensation. And the game's ending leaves things wide open for a sequel…

David Sutton

Fortean Times Verdict

INVENTIVE, TASTELESS, CATHARTIC ULTRA-VIOLENT FUN **8**

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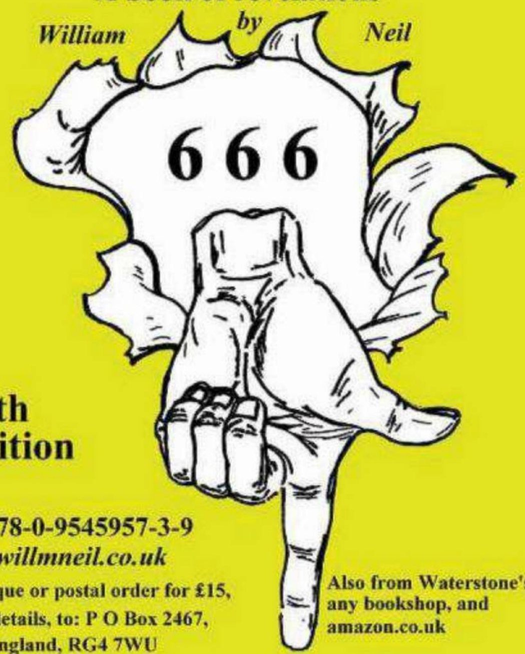

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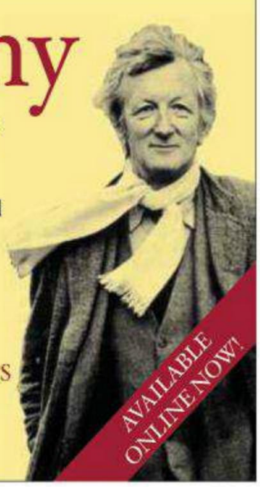
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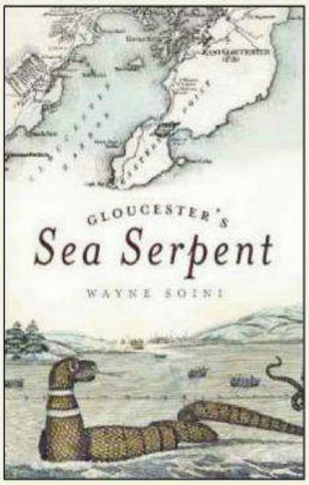

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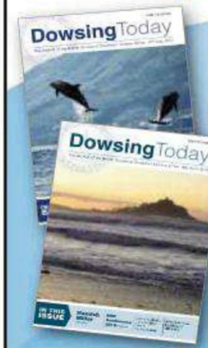

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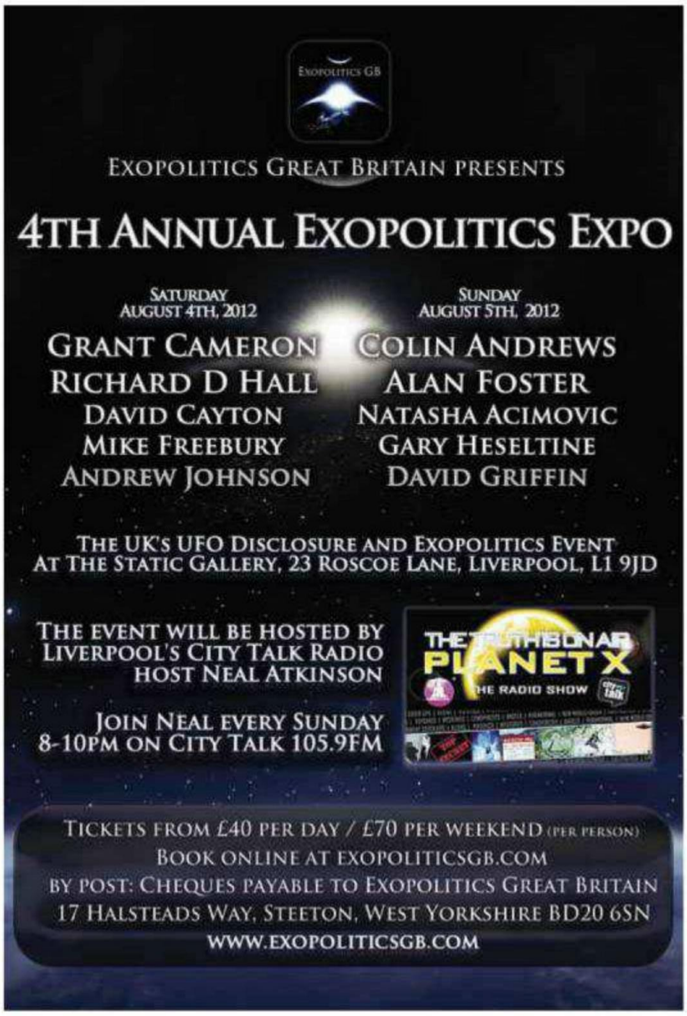

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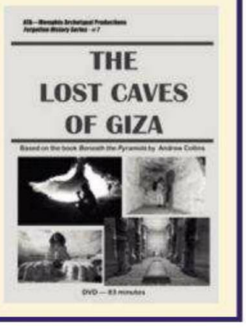

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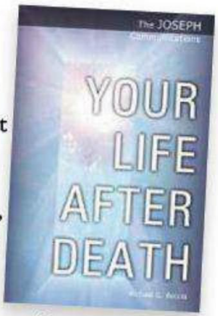

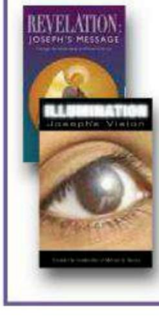

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Dear FT...

letters

Cosmic reincarnation

The question of life after death features in the Ghostwatch column and elsewhere in *Fortean Times* – for example, the book *Houdini and Conan Doyle* [reviewed **FT285:56**], which deals with the two men's long-standing dispute over the topic. In the same issue, there were also reviews of Anthony Peake's *The Out-of-Body Experience* (p.55), which is concerned to some extent with the relationship between consciousness and the brain, and Steven Manly's *Vision of the Multiverse* (p.59), a book discussing how many physicists are coming to the view that our Universe may be just one of an infinite number of alternative universes. If there are limitless universes and individual consciousness is a function of the brain's activities, there is the intriguing possibility that physical reincarnation could actually occur.

The human brain, the seat of our consciousness and reason, ultimately operates by means of changes in the states of the atoms of which it is composed. Individual consciousness is associated with a complex pattern of electrical/neuronal connections, and may be localised in some part of the brain. It is a fundamental precept of quantum theory that all atomic particles of the same type are completely indistinguishable. There is no way of determining whether a pair of electrons (or protons, neutrons etc.) has been exchanged. Therefore, if the same pattern of electrical/neuronal connections should recur at some other place and time, it will be exactly the same person.

The number of atomic particles in the brain is so large that such recurrence is far too unlikely to happen at any time on the Earth, or even anywhere else in the Universe. However, if the Universe is one of an infinite number, the pattern will almost certainly recur in another of these universes. This would seem to be some form of physical reincarnation, albeit with unimaginable separations in space or time. Because of the immense separations, this process may never be verifiable and we will never be aware that it had happened. Even so, the suggestion would be falsifiable if any of the assumptions made here could be shown to be untrue. It raises a number of questions that are fortean in nature: for instance, does the whole of the person's life experiences have to be repeated? What if only part of the brain pattern recurs? What about multiple recurrences in the same Universe?

Arnold Taylor
Isle of Wight

Captains Smith

Yesterday [3 April] I was reading Carol Fenlon's article about the *RMS Titanic* in this month's issue, wherein she makes several references to the ship's Captain, EJ Smith [**FT287:30–35**]. Today I was re-reading a retelling of the Maury Island incident on the Internet, which reminded me that Kenneth Arnold's co-investigator was a Captain EJ Smith. I guess that from now on I will pay more attention to the captain's name when I fly or sail!

Wojciech Gaworzewski
London

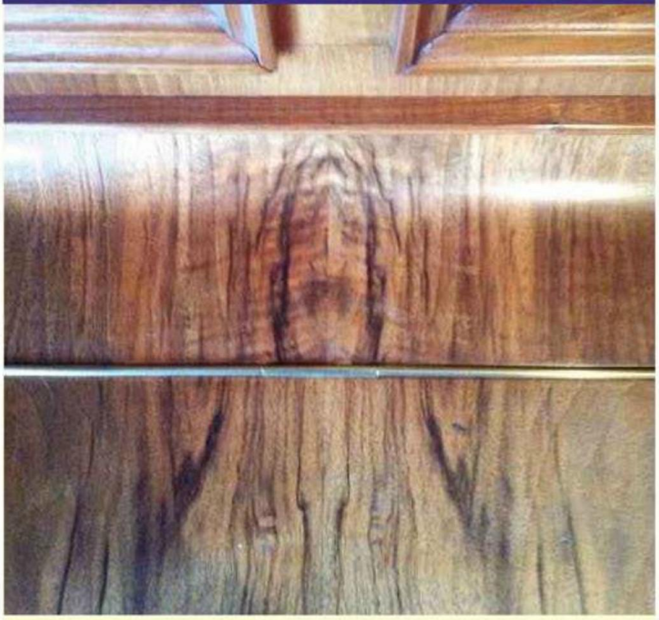
Demon dogs

I love curling up with the late John Keel's *The Complete Guide to Mysterious Beings* [UK title: *Strange Creatures from Time and Space*]. In Chapter Three, "Demon Dogs and Phantom Cats", he describes "a plague of frightening and terrible animals" that swept over the Middle East, killing many people in Armenia and Assyria in the eighth century AD. The *Chronicon of Denys de Tell-Mahre* describes them thus: "…their muzzle was small and long, and they had great ears, like those of horses. The skin on their dorsal spine resembled the bristles of pigs, and stuck straight up." It was said that whole herds of goats and sheep were devoured by them, and for some reason dogs did not bark at them.

This description fits the chupacabra(s) that appeared in Puerto Rico in the 1980s and killed goats and chickens, and brings to mind John Sibbick's rendering of a chupacabra(s) killing a goat on the cover of **FT89** (August 1996) that has been widely plagiarised by paranormal and cryptozoological publications. Could this critter have made a second appearance in time and space?

Greg May
Orlando, Florida

Simulacra Corner



When Perry Davis had an old piano french polished, a bearded face appeared. Many would (of course) see it as a portrait of Jesus.

We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them to the PO box above (with a stamped addressed envelope or international reply coupon) or to sieveking@forteantimes.com – please tell us your postal address and we'll send you an exclusive ***Fortean Times*** *gift.*

Primordial

I'm writing with regard to the recent "star jelly" discoveries [**FT283:22**]. Dr Immanuel Velikovsky believed the manna eaten in the desert by God's chosen people was actually blobs of petroleum ejected from Venus. Perhaps this "manna" is what we currently call "star jelly". In my opinion, the composition of star jelly indicates it to be a sort of primordial substance; "pre-matter", a blend of antimatter and dark matter that creates a plasma from which everything of mortal substance is composed. The only thing missing in star jelly is a spark of life, but then again these gobs of universal ingredients could be every bit as alive as stars, planets… or humans.

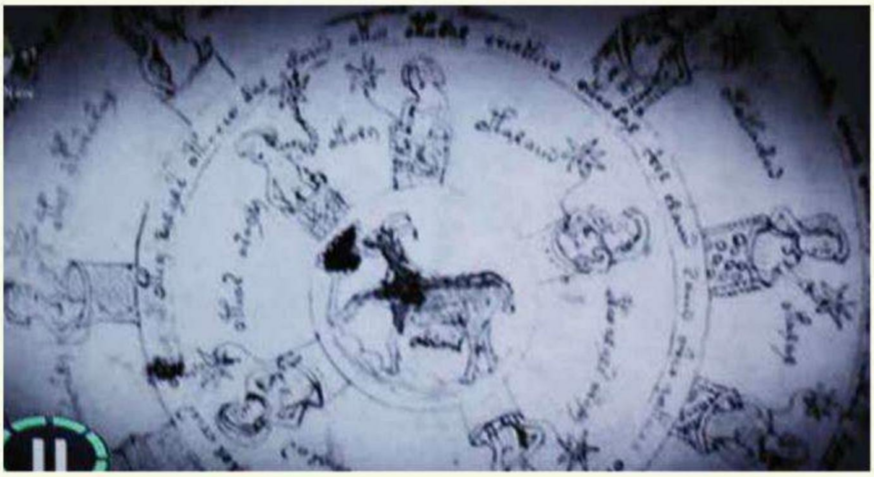
Tamy Thompson
By email

Tiny arms' purpose

So we now have a feathered sort of *Tyrannosaurus rex*; and they've always wondered what those ridiculously tiny arms could be used for. Mutual grooming? Birds do that to each other with their beaks.

Hugh Henry
By email

WorldMags



Voynich clue?

I was watching *Great British Ghosts* No. 6 on the Yesterday television channel, concerning the Hellfire Club, when an image two minutes in (credited "ritual" horoscope c.1760) caught my eye. It was quite clearly a black and white image of a horoscope using the same typography as the Voynich manuscript [**FT130:42–46**, **260:58–59**]. I emailed Altamar, the production company, to ask them if they could establish where the image originated, but have had no reply. If this turns out to be associated with the Voynich, it could prove the age of the manuscript and perhaps even help decode it. Can anyone identify its source?

Georgina Skipper
Wyke Regis, Dorset

Greasy Man and Spidey

Bob Rickard's informative special report on Malaysia's Greasy Man/ Orang Minyak [**FT287:12–15**] describes the modern Greasy Man as "a mix of Spring-heeled Jack and Dracula". Given that he goes on to say that the Orang Minyak is credited with "incredible feats of agility" and that his escapes feature "super stealth and super wall-climbing ability" plus the facility to "crawl across ceilings and climb on the slenderest cotton thread", I think we can add Stan Lee and Steve Ditko's iconic 1961 comic book creation Spider-Man into the mix of influences that may have helped shape modern descriptions of the Greasy Man.

The fact that Spider-Man has been embraced by popular culture worldwide, not only through Marvel comics, but also via several successful TV cartoon series and a sequence of blockbuster movies, means, I believe, it's feasible that Spidey's fictional attributes could have fed into latter-day descriptions of the Greasy Man. "'Nuff said," to quote Stan Lee.

Excelsior!

Martyn P Jackson
Cramlington, Northumberland

Tinfoil giant & cricket

• The encounter with a tinfoil giant [**FT287:75**] reminded me of the 1963 Falkville, Alabama, case, in which a local policeman managed to photograph a large humanoid wearing what appeared to be a tinfoil suit. The rather blurred photo does resemble somewhat the image you have used to illustrate the 2003 West Sussex incident. In the Alabama case, a UFO had been reported shortly before the humanoid was spotted, so an ET connection was suspected.

• Barry Baldwin's cricketing curiosities [**FT287:56–57**] were fascinating. He alludes to the fact that cricket may have been popular in the United States before baseball took over in the run-up to the Civil War. I always found it interesting that one of General Custer's officers, Captain Benteen, refers briefly to cricket in a letter he wrote shortly after the Battle of the Little Big Horn (1876). Regarding Jane Austen's reference to baseball in *Northanger Abbey*, I believe that there is an even earlier reference in an 18th-century English book on children's games, which describes a set of rules that are not unlike the later New York version (supposedly invented by General Abner Doubleday, while he was a cadet at West Point).

Geoff Clifton
Solihull, West Midlands

Red cars

Regarding the Mythconception that red cars cost more to insure [**FT286:19**]: I have heard people express the belief that red cars (or their drivers) are more accident-prone, and I'd also heard the "myth" that insurance companies charge more for them. Several studies on car accidents and injury rates did not place red vehicles at the top of the list. However, a recently published study suggests a possible reason for these beliefs. In its issue of 14 February 2012, the journal *Aggressive Behavior* published "When Drivers See Red: Car Color Frustrators and Drivers' Aggressiveness" (online via http://bit.ly/zV2tQy / http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com).

The abstract reads: "Research has found that exposition to red is associated with physiological activation and fighting spirit. A field experiment was conducted to explore whether the color of cars is related to an aggressive response. Drivers waiting at a traffic light were blocked by an experimental car. The color of the car varied (blue, red, green, black, and white). The amount of time that elapsed until the drivers responded by honking their horns or beaming their headlights was the dependent variable. It was found that the red car elicited early aggressive response."

It's possible that a psychological perception of red car drivers being more aggressive could lead to their being pulled over more often by traffic police, but I've never seen any data, and I'm sure that I haven't noticed a disproportionate number of red cars pulled over. Just out of curiosity, I checked my own auto insurance policy, and the car's colour is not noted anywhere on it. It would be faintly ridiculous, anyway, since I could change the colour every week with no more than a couple of cases of spray paint (and a subsequent diagnosis of OCD, probably).

During the 1970s, when I worked third shift, a local psychic was a frequent guest on one of the all-night radio shows I listened to. She would always rant about how terrible red cars were because they attracted accidents, and everyone should get rid of their red cars "and get them all off the road". It was a huge issue for her and she never failed to bring it up. This was a popular radio show on a station that could be heard for hundreds of miles, so you can see how this sort of "folk belief" gets primed.

Inanna Arthen / Vyrdolak
Pepperell, Massachusetts

Zombie mix-up

The black-and-white photo in your Zombie roundup [**FT286:5**] does not depict the alleged Zombie Clerveus Narcisse, as the caption claims, but the alleged Zombie Felicia Felix-Mentor, as photographed by Zora Neale Hurston during the writer's 1936–37 sojourn in Haiti. Published in Hurston's 1938 book *Tell My Horse*, the photo subsequently has appeared in many books and articles on Zombies, even though the Haitian public health officer Louis F Mars long ago debunked any connection between Hurston's unfortunate photo subject and the late Felix-Mentor. The alleged Zombie, for example, lacked her predecessor's leg fracture.

I capitalise Zombie because Zora did, partially as a sign of respect for this controversial segment of the Haitian population. I suspect she also did it to emphasise the alliteration of the word with her own first name. My 2004 short story about the Hurston/Felix-Mentor encounter, "Zora and the Zombie", was a Nebula and Stoker nominee at the time, and is reprinted in my new collection *The Pottawatomie Giant and Other Stories* (PS Publishing, 2012). In the book, I credit your fine magazine as an ongoing inspiration: My story "Close Encounters," for example, is about the Ozark UFO contactee Buck Nelson [**FT269:51**].

Andy Duncan
Frostburg, Maryland

Editor's note: *FT* published a (supposedly) genuine photograph of Clervius (aka Clairvius) Narcisse in 1994 [**FT78:30**].

Timewave waiting time

The articles on the 2012 phenomena [**FT285:33–47**] rather glossed over the significance of Terence McKenna's timewave theory, which is unusual in that faults in the theory that were perceived almost as soon as it was announced may be what saves it from 22 December 2012 onwards.

McKenna essentially drew a graph, with or without the assistance of psychedelics or the *I Ching*, that tracked significant technological innovations over time. This resulted in a curve that, when continued from the present into what was then the future, indicated that all possible technological innovation will have happened by November 2012, a date he later revised forward about a month to take advantage of the Mayan long count.

Leaving aside the New Age mumbo-jumbo, there are good reasons to think that his graph has something going for it. Defining a technological innovation as one that changes how people live their lives and/or enables further innovation will produce a graph (innovations against time) that almost flatlines until the 17th century before becoming a rising curve heading inexorably towards the vertical. But using this to justify such a precise date as November 2012, never mind 21 December this year, misses three points that McKenna fluffed.

[1] Should the innovation be counted from its invention or its mass distribution?

[2] Should improvements upon innovations count equally, less or not at all as the innovation they improve upon?

[3] Should the innovation only be counted from when its world-changing effects occur?

Take television, for example. Do we date it from 1928, when Baird demonstrated his mechanical scanner? Do we date it from 1936, when Harry Rantzen (father of Esther) developed a fully electronic version – the one that the BBC actually used in its first regular broadcasts? Or do we count it from the Queen's Coronation, or the assassination of Kennedy, or the first body bags coming back from Vietnam?

In all cases, even if the three questions are settled it becomes more and more crucial to pinpoint a precise date. Only then could we get the graph's predictions right the nearer we get to end-point. Clearly this is impossible – Baird's TV influenced only a few, but when exactly did the Vietnam images make a crucial difference in that war?

McKenna also missed problems with manufacture, distribution and commercial willingness – the technology behind the fax machine was in place in 1975 but didn't begin to transform business for another 10 years because the manufacturers of modems, photocopiers and laser printers had lots of their existing stuff to sell to a huge market before combining the three into a fourth device.

But there can be no doubt the timewave principle is more or less untouched by such details; it is not just that the number of innovations is increasing, it is the rate of increase that is increasing. After all, I would ask most readers over 40: "What was the length of time between you first hearing about computers and owning one" – and then ask: "What was the length of time between you first hearing about Twitter and the Arab Spring"?

Sensible admirers of McKenna's insight reckon that the innovation immediately preceding the graph going vertical will be when computers themselves are taught to innovate, but the ability of humans to make and distribute (and learn the bloody control gadgets) will still be limited. But only for so long.

Me, I reckon we'll all be Gods, dead or possibly both in 10 years, but don't expect me to point at a particular month.

Steve Wilson
By email

Flights from nowhere

In "Flights from nowhere" [**FT287:29**], Jenny Randles mentions strange aircraft seen over North Wales. She refers to a "wartime transport" aircraft in 1987 and "something like a black B-25 bomber" in 1978. However, the following two aircraft might fit these descriptions:

1. Prior to the introduction of the A300-600ST Beluga in 1995, Airbus used a number of Super Guppy aircraft. These were converted Boeing C-97J Stratocruisers of 1940s vintage, powered by turboprops instead of piston engines. They regularly carried wings from Broughton to Toulouse in France. See www.allaboutguppys.com

2. Up to 1992, the RAF was still using a small number of piston-engined Avro Shackleton AEW-2 aircraft. This four-engined aircraft had its roots in the famous Avro Lancaster bomber and to the untrained eye could easily have been mistaken for its wartime ancestor. It is more than likely that these aircraft called at RAF Valley from time to time.

Mike Breslin
Liverpool, Merseyside

I was very interested in "Flights from nowhere", and, as a lifelong aviation enthusiast, a few thoughts occur to me. The Lockheed C-130 Hercules is repeatedly mentioned; these venerable aircraft spend a lot of time at very low-level on navigation exercises. North Wales is often used as part of the UK's extensive low-flying training areas. It is by no means impossible that this was what the witnesses saw. It doesn't account for the lack of noise, but perhaps the wind was in the wrong direction – C-130s aren't as noisy as pure-jet powered aircraft, but I'm sure Jenny Randles has considered this.

The mention of smaller aircraft, 'wartime transports' and the suggestion of survey flights bring up the possibility that this was exactly what was seen, as an outfit called Air Atlantique used to operate a large fleet of WW2-era Douglas DC3 (Dakota) aeroplanes on survey flights and pollution control, necessitating lots of low-level flights over water. I believe they were involved in all sorts of other contract work, and may be a further point of enquiry. They are based at Coventry Airport, and although their active DC3 fleet has shrunk, they may be able to help.

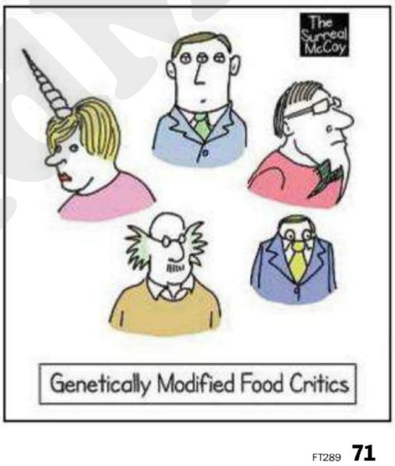
Andreas from the Wirral may have seen an actual B-25 bomber, as a group based in the Netherlands called the Duke Of Brabant's Air Force has one, and regularly visits airshows in the UK, although it's not black. Aces High based at North Weald, Essex, had a B-25 camera ship that undertook a lot of work some years back, including filming of the *Memphis Belle* remake in 1989, but I believe it is now back in the USA.

There's also mention of the Airbus Beluga, but a possible misidentification could involve that aeroplane's predecessor, the 'Super Guppy'. These were in service from 1972 and were based on the 1940s-era Boeing Stratocruiser, a prop driven aircraft.

Of course none of these ideas necessarily preclude the intriguing possibility of a genuine time-slip, should such a phenomenon actually exist, or some other paranormal explanation, but I offer them as a conceivable misperception, to be considered and perhaps discounted.

Keep watching the skies!

Simon Ramshaw
By email



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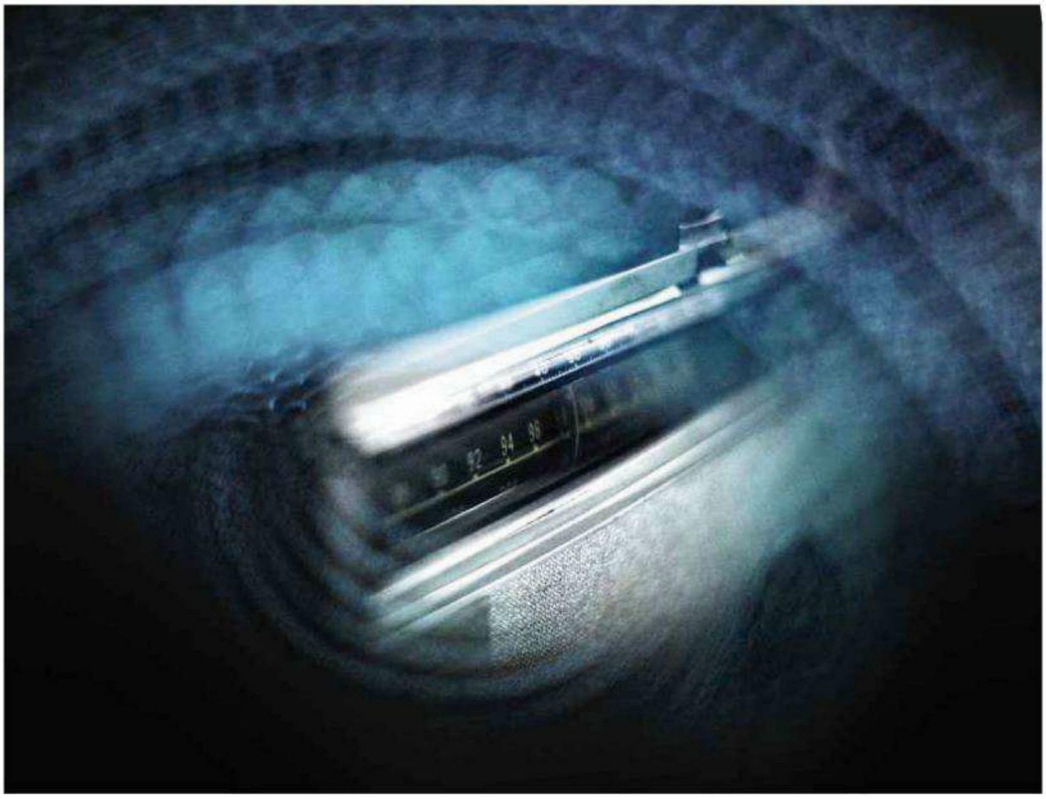
Possessed Radios



ETIENNE GILFILLAN

It was an early spring morning back in the late 1970s and I was cycling to work as usual. I was a milkman and, as this meant an early start, I would leave home any time between three and four o'clock in the morning. At that time, I lived in Chatham, Kent, so I would cycle out through the countryside to Gillingham. I used to listen to the birds sing, watch the dawn creeping slowly in and hear the trees swaying as if they were talking to each other. But this morning was going to be different.

The day before, I had gone to the market and bought myself a second-hand radio to listen to on my milk round. It was one of those small, old ones with knobs that clicked when you turned it off and on. That night, I had tuned the radio to the station I wanted – BBC Radio 2 – turned it off and put it into a bag, which I then put inside my saddlebag.

I had got about halfway out into the country, and everything was normal – the birds singing and so forth – when out of the blue the radio came blaring on at high volume. This freaked me out – but something else freaked me out even more. My bicycle started to go around in circles – around and around! I tried to shout, scream even, but nothing happened and I felt as if I were being choked. When I finally managed a scream, out of sheer fright, my cycle started to go back the way I had come.

I ripped the bag off the back of my cycle and threw it into the field – I don't know why. I turned my bike around and headed for work. Once I got there, my friend George took one look at me and said that I looked as if I'd seen a ghost. To this day, I often wonder if there was something strange about the radio. Was it possessed?

A while after this, I had decided to go back to my own trade as a baker and was offered a job in a bakery in Gillingham. I had done two weeks on the day shift and was then told I was to do permanent nights on my own. I didn't mind, and was told I could start any time between six and 11pm. I decided I would start at 10 and see how things went.

As soon as I got to work, I turned on the ovens and got the first mix on the go. Once I had moulded that, I put it in the proofer and got another lot going, along with a small mix for milk loaves. Everything was going fine.

> At this point, the radio came on, spouting what sounded like gibberish! The pans began to rattle on the shelves...

At this point, the radio decided to come on, on its own, spouting what sounded like gibberish! Yes, after my recent radio experience, I was a bit nervous, to say the least – and even more so when, a few minutes later, the pans started to rattle on the shelves for no apparent reason. It felt as if the bakery had been turned into a fridge, as it become suddenly very cold. What with the radio blaring, the pans rattling and the freezing temperature, there was no way I was staying. I turned everything off and got out of there as quickly as I possibly could!

The following morning, I went back to the bakery to face the music, but instead I found out some interesting things. The people who lived over the bakery, it seemed, often dabbled in the Ouija board, and this was the reason the former night baker had left. Over the last 30 years, I've had no further experiences of this kind, I'm happy to say.

Chris Kilner
Kenya

Lively set-top box

An odd thing happened to me in mid-June 2011. I had been disturbed during the night and – half asleep – I decided to use the bathroom. Upon returning to bed, I had just settled back waiting to drift off to sleep again when my set-top box turned on. At first I thought I had leaned on the remote control and accidentally turned it on, but it was on the floor where I had left it. As I was about to pick it up and turn the set-top box off, it turned itself off. Bending over the side of the bed to look at the remote, I noticed that a black beetle was walking across the buttons. I tracked its movements as it continued off onto the carpet and across the floor. As I was settling back down again, puzzled and wondering if the beetle had the force to push buttons, the set-top box flared into life again. There was nothing to interfere with the remote this time and I continued to stare at it until it turned itself off again. Up until the moment when I must have drifted off to sleep again, I continued to watch the set-top box in case it happened a third time. As far as I'm aware, it didn't, and I don't recall anything else until waking up the following morning.

I can only think of two possible explanations: the beetle walking across the remote provided enough pressure to activate the button, or the set-top box was going through an update. But both of these explanations seem highly unlikely, verging on the impossible. Even if the beetle were heavy enough to turn on the box, it doesn't explain how it turned off afterwards and also why it managed to turn on and off again by itself with no interference on the remote.

Secondly, I've never heard of any equipment that could or would turn itself on to run an update. Any other possibilities?

Neil Smith
Royston, Hertfordshire

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The voice on the tape

When I was a wee tyke in the early 1980s, I used to play with the next-door neighbours' two kids, who were roughly the same age as I was. It was back in the days when those big cassette tape recorders came out – they were flat, with a sliding handle at one end and big chunky buttons; one step up from Fischer Price technology. We all got one and had great times listening to the *Muppet Album* and the like. Well, these machines could obviously record stuff as well as play it, and the girl next door, being a theatrical young lady, was always taping herself singing while she danced about the place. It was on the occasion of reviewing one of her efforts that we heard the most horrible of voices – the type that gives you goose bumps as you recall it 20 years later!

On the tape, my neighbour was singing "Hi-Ho-Hi-Ho, it's off to work we go," and obviously dancing about the room, as she got fainter then louder as she breezed by the microphone. As she moved away for the third time, we could hear a voice on the tape that was both gravelly and painfully slow. The girl could still be heard in the background, and this voice seemed to be pressed right up to the microphone singing "Hiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii-Hhooooooooooo-Hiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii-Hooooooooooo," and so on. It's hard to get across the tone and speed of this voice, although I can still remember it just as clear as day. It sounded like someone being deliberately frightening and 'accompanying' her, but was way slower and deeper and 'older', for want of a better word. It was a layered sound, a bit like singing in rounds – but in this case, singing in rounds with a demon.

The girl in question was always making these tapes, so couldn't exactly recall making this particular one, or indeed the circumstances involved. However, I'm sure she would have remembered the intervention of an adult laying down freakish vocals on her schoolgirl song. As strange phenomena are said to often accompany young girls, I have always wondered if this was a genuinely spooky event or something with a more rational explanation. I tend to come down on the side of spooky, as this was a terrifying moment for all of us children at the time. It was bloody 'orrible and no mistake!

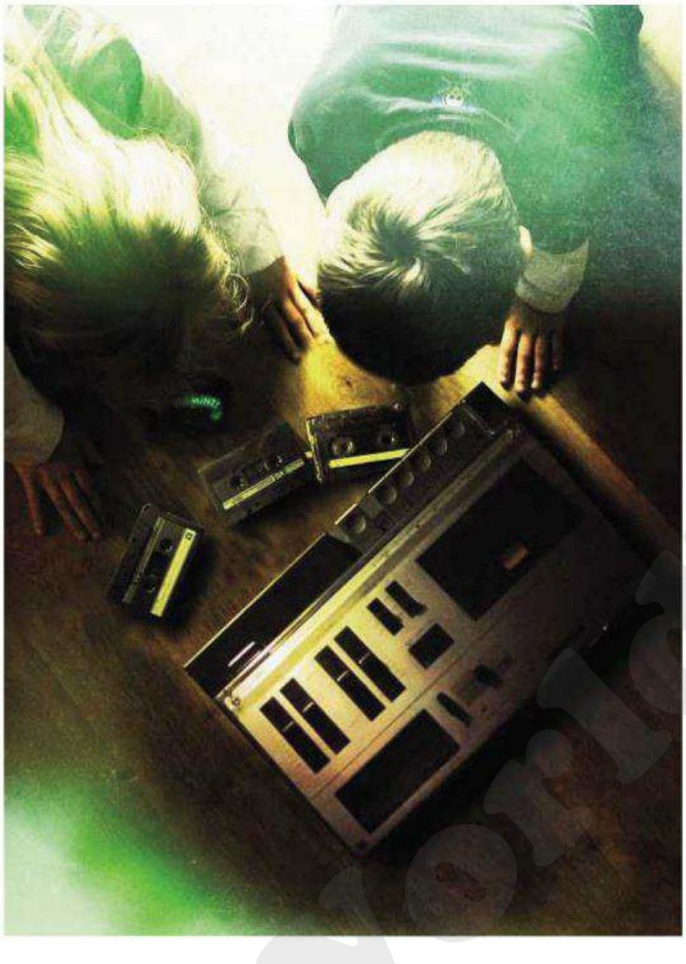
Mick Harrison
by email

Muh muh muh

My only encounter with the inexplicable happened about 10 years ago when I was working as a programmer for a software house in Northwich, Cheshire. I had to call a customer to ask for some more information about a help desk call they had logged. During the dialling tone, before they had answered my call, I heard a voice moaning what I can only recall as something like "muh, muh, muh", slowly, over and over again in a very low, deep voice. This genuinely frightened me, and for a few seconds I thought about putting my phone on speaker so that the other people in the office could hear it. For some reason I didn't, and after a minute or so I hung up. It might have been some telecoms engineer's sick idea of a joke, but whatever it was it scared the hell out of me.

David Maynard
By email

We heard the most horrible of voices – the type that gives you goose bumps 20 years later!



ETIENNE GILFILLAN

Band practice chatterers

I was in a band for a while in 2002, and we used to practise in a large room on the top floor of an old woollen mill in Bradford. As we were all young, the novelty of sheer volume had not yet worn off, so we used to practise obscenely loudly.

While playing, I would often hear the sound of a loud, but very indistinct, conversation over the music. Concerned about upsetting the neighbours, I would sometimes call a halt to the music, only to hear the voices hush as the music stopped, or sometimes slightly after. Other members of the band began to notice the 'chat', to my great relief, as I was beginning to doubt my sanity. There were no people nearby to make the noise, as the room was quite isolated in an otherwise disused building complex.

The other strange aspect is that the 'chat' wasn't there all the time, but only occasionally, usually around 6pm. Sometimes, when the noise was at its most noticeable, there would be a strong and unmistakable scent of pipe tobacco. I had initially put this down to overload on my amplifier, but on one occasion I actually did destroy the output stage of my amp and the burning smell that generated was quite different.

Daniel B Wood
By email

The Holy Company

Late one night in about 1990, I was driving to a small village in the mountains of Asturias, north-west Spain, where some of my family live. The narrow road forces you to drive slowly, especially when it's dark, so I was being particularly careful. I saw something shining by the trees, quite close to the road, and quickly realised it was a fire. With a shiver, I noticed that there were several hooded figures standing around the flames, all of them dressed in dark colours. Feeling superstitious, I didn't want to stare at them, so I kept driving as fast as I possibly could, forgetting my previous caution.

I arrived at the village feeling rather nervous, although I didn't want to admit it. I've heard many old tales about the Holy Company – a procession of souls in torment that wander around rural areas and are considered a harbinger of death. The following morning, we found out that there had been a car crash on that very road the day before. I can't say for sure that it happened at exactly on the same spot I'd seen the hooded figures, but I found it deeply disturbing.

AD
Asturias, Spain

Worldmags

LETTER FROM CAMBODIA

1. Spirits: good, evil, persuadable

FT's errant web mistress **JEN OGILVIE** files her first report from Cambodia.

Svay Koy, in Kompong Chnang province, is a regular Cambodian village. Buffalos trudge dusty tracks, families loll in hammocks under houses, tinny Asian pop shatters the peace. Except for a few drivers sitting in the café, everyone knows everyone – or at least, everyone knows the neighbours you can *see*.

Cambodia is in the middle of the dry season, and all round Svay Koy stretch burnt, empty fields. A stone surveys them from a small rise at the village boundary, a scrap of red cloth proudly knotted round its head. We found an old lady sitting and bowing to it. She introduced herself as Hoy Vun, and the stone as Neak Ta Kirri.

Not all villages in Cambodia still have a tutelary ancestor spirit, a *neak ta*. Many disappeared under the Khmer Rouge – Pol Pot's *The Sayings of Angkar* (a.k.a. his 'Little Red Book') had no place for them, and the villagers died or fled or lost faith. "Before they do believe," says Hoy, "but they always run away, they have no time for *neak ta* they always run so far."

Hoy ran, too, and hid in the forest, but one day she crept back and promised Kirri that if he could save her she would look after him forever. She survived, and kept her promise. Her grandfather had taught her what to do, and now she comes every day – and everyone believes again. When families are sick or scared, they find an old person like Hoy who knows how to speak to Kirri, and then go and burn incense and make offerings. Kirri can do "everything". After Khmer New Year, every day for a month before the rains start, the whole village throws a party to honour Kirri and ask for his protection. And Kirri listens. Villagers have built him a new brick shrine to show how much his help is appreciated.

The *neak ta* are products of Khmer syncretic beliefs. Most are rocks or trees or even termite mounds, sometimes anthropomorphised with a scrap of clothing, or they're simple statues. Their natural forms link them to earth and fertility, like the ancient Shivite lingam cults. A few inhabit old Hindu statues but have their own, non-Hindu identities.

They were embraced by Buddhism. Monasteries have their own *neak ta*; monks bless villages' annual *neak ta* ceremonies. Buddhism and the spirits complement each other: Buddha concerns himself with matters of the soul, merit and reincarnation, while the spirits muck in with everyday village life.

The *neak ta* were once village founders, mythological heroes, repellers of invasion; spirits brought to the village by a new governor or monastery; or dreamt apparitions. They can be male, female or a couple, and often first signal their presence with strange music or a light on a hill or in a tree. In most cases, their elevation from minor spirit to village *neak ta* is slow, earned by supernatural services rendered. They live at the edge of villages, protection from the evils without – disease, war, bad weather, wild beasts, venal officials, or dangerous spirits. They also boost internal harmony, bringing everyone together in ceremonies, mediating in disputes. Some can find lost objects or animals, or predict the outcome of a boat race.

JEN OGILVIE

ABOVE: Hoy Vun acted as a guide. The stone Neak Ta Kirri kept her safe during the Khmer Rouge years.

There are other, untamed *neak ta*, animist spirits of the mountains and rivers and swamps. The wild *neak ta* of the forest are particularly feared, though if you ask nicely they'll stop animals eating you. Touchy Kampot forest *neak ta* Moen Kuong ate one old man for saying bad things, and when another complained about his music, he sent him blind and gave him gangrene of the penis.[1]

The world of the spirits is dynamic and changes as the human world it interpenetrates changes. Before trees are cut down, ceremonies can be conducted to rehouse the *neak ta*; when last year the Phnom Penh Municipal Court moved into new buildings, its *neak ta* was marched over to join it.[2] And new *neak ta* can be created, as when a man near Wat Prey Kral, Kampot province, covered up a dog turd with twigs and later travellers presumed this was the home of a *neak ta* and built a shrine – it's now known as the "dog shit" *neak ta*.[3]

The village *neak ta* acts just for its village, and it has its own unique character and rituals. The Cham Muslim communities and the animist hill tribes have their own traditions, but Khmer villages mix and match according to custom and what seems to work – different spirits, monsters, ceremonies, mediums.

This variety and the jumbling together of belief systems makes it difficult to get a handle on the Khmer afterlife. Many spirits seem to exist outside the cycle of reincarnation, which is anyway not immediate and never assured. If a person dies and is not taken home for cremation, they will wander lost and crying out forever. The fields and trees writhe with ghosts of Khmer Rouge victims – and, increasingly, with casualties of a blind enthusiasm for motor vehicles.

One of Cambodia's most important annual events – Pchum Ben, or the Festival of the Hungry Ghosts – helps dead ancestors on to the next life and eases their suffering. For a few days, the gates of Hell are opened and spirits trapped there by bad karma roam the Earth. Everyone goes to the temple, summoned by a drum through the pre-dawn darkness. After chanting and incense-burning inside, you walk the perimeter throwing balls of rice and fruit to the ghosts. Later, families give food to the monks for good luck, and to transfer merit to their ancestors.

There's also a whole universe of

other supernatural beings – depraved females, godlings who were once monks, guardians of houses, guardians of animals, ghosts that live on dirt and excrement, spirits that live in the human body itself… None of these entities are seen regularly, but they make their presence felt by causing or curing sickness, growing or killing crops, spooking animals, or giving you goosebumps.

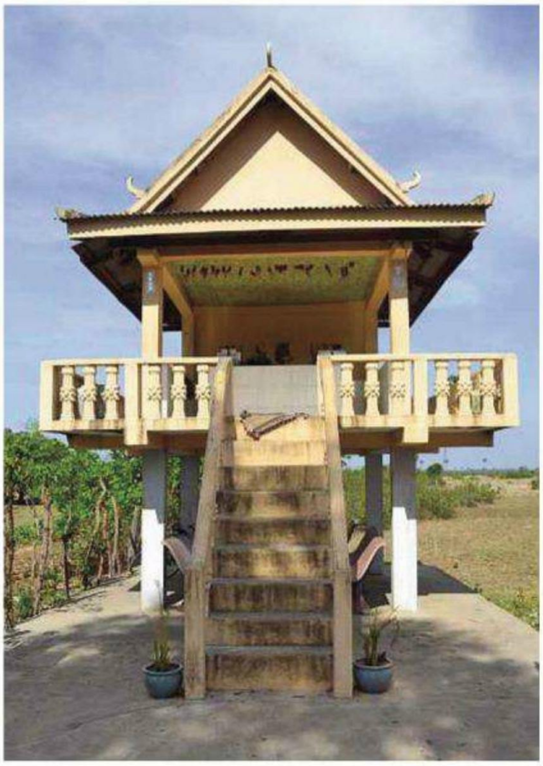
Some spirits maintain order, ensure fertility and banish disease; others are meddlesome troublemakers. Many move between good and bad depending on what you're offering – like most in positions of power here. They must be treated with respect. Good spirits can fight land-grabbing companies, illegal loggers and corrupt officials. If you pray to them and burn incense and play music, if you give them food – or beer, fags, coffee, sweets – then they might help you. One day, Yeak Laom Lake, in Ratanakkiri province, suddenly turned muddy, with a blue tinge and a strange bubbling at its centre. Locals gathered to offer the spirit of the lake a raft piled with fruit, cigarettes, rice, and wine mixed with pig's blood, to persuade it to make the water clear again.[4]

It's a barter system, and the scarier the spirits, the more powerful they are – power you can harness to your advantage. Just outside Svay Koy, there used to be a house that had been abandoned since Khmer Rouge times but mysteriously never got dirty. You could hear the ghosts talking at night. If you were nice to them, they'd let you sleep there, but if you ignored them or were rude they'd chase you away.

One day a rich man driving past asked them to help him recover some money he was owed. He got it back the very next day and so, as he'd promised, he built them a new house. Now lots of men stop and pray and, if their wishes are granted, buy a new spirit house to add to the ghosts' growing collection.

Malevolent spirits have been blamed for mass faintings at Cambodian garment factories (see **FT284:22**) and monks are called in to expel them. Other trouble-causing entities prefer possession. Generally, these cases seem to end in men waving swords at neighbours, but Casey Nelson, who blogs at LTO Cambodia, saw a 16-year-old Vietnamese girl possessed in the street. "The girl was suddenly seized in what appeared to be some kind of fit, going very pale, her muscles becoming rigid and she began laughing maniacally." She'd touched one of the spirit boats that are left outside by people trying to clear their house of bad spirits. When ordered to leave, the spirit replied (in Khmer, which the girl doesn't speak), "*I don't want to go. I like this body. This is fun. I will not leave this body.*"[5]

Women can be particularly monstrous once in the supernatural realm. The *arb* has internal organs hanging down from a floating head, and uses her long tongue to steal fœtuses from women's bellies.[6] The *bray* – a woman who has died a virgin or in childbirth – has bulging eyes and a long tongue like the *arb*, and she lives in a tree. She can make herself appear beautiful, and fools men into agreeing to marry her before trapping them in her tree. No one in Svay Koy has seen a *bray* recently, but sometimes if a child walks through the forest then falls sick, the local healer (*kru*) will know that a *bray* is angry, and advise leaving offerings under her tree.



ABOVE: The Ghost House, just outside Svay Koy.

Some spirits maintain order, others cause trouble

LEFT: The stone in the fetching red cape is Kirri, the village Neak Ta, or ancestor spirit.

BOTH PHOTOS: JEN OGILVIE

One way to fight bad spirits is to build your own supernatural security guards. *Ting mong* are like scarecrows, but more heavily armed – most have a machete, wooden sword or toy gun, but wooden RPG-launchers have also been spotted.[7] Ngim Savuth, a Svay Koy farmer, has a baggy-jeaned gangster by his front gate. You make a *ting mong*, he says, "when you get sick, when you're feeling bad – when you're feeling like the ghost is in the home".

Or bad spirits can be made into good spirits, even the evil *bray*. Trapped by a monk in a pedestal or statue, she becomes a Buddhist *boramei*, a guardian of the monastery – although she never completely forgets her old ways, and on certain "holy" nights walks abroad transformed into a ball of fire.[8]

And then there are the *araks*. Four times a year, when it gets dark, Ngim puts on his white robes and traditional musicians call the spirits down to enter his body. "I have four spirits," he says. They are invisible, even to him, and speak a secret Pali, the language of the spirits. His neighbours take turns to ask the spirits "to make them lucky, healthy, family happy, no ghost in home". They are scared, but he's not – the spirits always leave when they're done. He remembers nothing of having the spirits inside him, except that he's left feeling "no power, sleepy". He's an *arak* because his father was before him; his youngest son will become *arak* when he is gone. "Cannot say no. If you say no, they make you sick."

Despite this, *araks* are increasingly found only in remote villages. Townsfolk may go to a medium for lottery predictions or advice on a new business venture, and every house has a shrine, for the spirits or Buddha, depending who you ask – but they have doctors, and no crops to be ruined by weather or disease, and they're far from the wild terrors of the forest. Villagers are more bound up in the spirits' world. And unlike in the West, there's no emphasis on psychics shuttling messages between family members through the veil, or on visions of the dead. The villagers of Svay Koy aren't interested in proofs that spirits exist. What matters is what you can get them to *do*. FT

NOTES

1 Alain Forest: *Le Culte des Génies Protecteurs au Cambodge*, L'Harmattan, 1992, p129.

2 *Phnom Penh Post*, 30 Dec 2011.

3 Ian Harris: *Cambodian Buddhism: History and Practice*, University of Hawai'i Press, 2005, p53.

4 *Phnom Penh Post*, 11 Nov 2011.

5 http://bit.ly/JxUmJP (ltocambodia.blogspot.co.uk).

6 The first post-Democratic Kampuchea film was *My Mother is Arb*, which shows how much success the Khmer Rouge had stamping out folklore.

7 *Phnom Penh Post*, 17 June 2011.

8 Wat Vihear Thorne, in Kratie Province, is guarded by 100 *bray*, virgins sacrificed and buried under its 100 columns after their mistress, Princess Krapum Chhuk, was swallowed by a crocodile. When the chief monk leaves the monastery, he has to travel by truck to make room for them all. *Harris, op. cit., p58.*

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

JEN OGILVIE used to work for *FT*, but ran away to Cambodia to work as a freelance journalist. For updates on how this experiment is progressing, head over to www.jenogi.com.

STRANGE AND SENSATIONAL STORIES FROM

THE ILLUSTRATED POLICE NEWS

LAW COURTS AND WEEKLY RECORD

JAN BONDESON presents more sensational stories and startling Victorian images from the "worst newspaper in England" – the *Illustrated Police News.*

13. THE STRANGE DEATH OF THE EARL OF LAUDERDALE

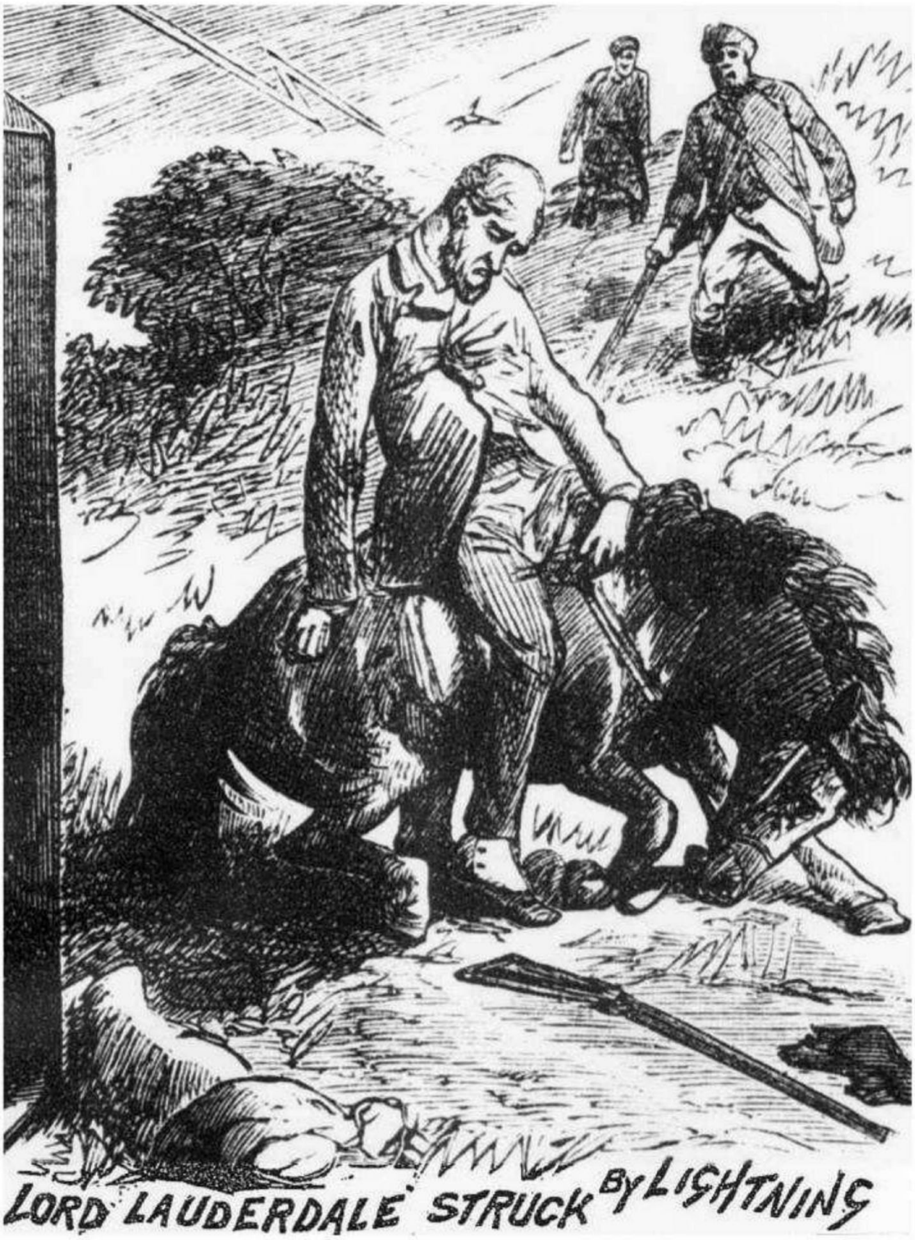
The Earldom of Lauderdale, created in 1624, is one of Scotland's most distinguished titles. The Earl of Lauderdale is the hereditary clan chief of Clan Maitland, and the bearer of the National Flag of Scotland. But after a number of elderly Earls had died childless in the mid-19th century, the title was in serious danger of becoming extinct. At the death of James Maitland, the ninth Earl, in 1860, he was succeeded by his elderly brother, Admiral Sir Anthony Maitland. The next in line to inherit the title was Admiral Sir Thomas Maitland, another childless old gentleman. It was speculated in the newspapers that perhaps the title would one day be inherited by Charles Maitland, the great-great-grandson of the second son of the sixth Earl. The son of an eccentric clergyman, this individual was living in very humble circumstances. Having served as a soldier for a while, he now made his living as a goods guard on the Exeter Railway.

And indeed, when the old Admiral expired in 1878, the obscure Charles Maitland, by this time 56 years of age, was in a position to remove his humble railwayman's cap, replace it with an elegant tall hat, and take possession of the family seat at Thirlestane Castle.

One might have expected the railway guard turned 12th Earl of Lauderdale to have led a jolly life, wining, dining and partying to excess to celebrate his elevation to the peerage. But Charles Maitland was a gloomy, morose character, who shunned company and became a recluse. He made the news in 1879 when he announced that he no longer wished to belong to the Conservative Association, not because he disagreed with the principles of Toryism, but because he did not want to belong to any political party. His only other newsworthy actions were that he allowed his tenants to hunt rabbits and hares on his estate, and that he once went to the theatre in Edinburgh.

What, I hear the reader exclaim, is this obscure Scottish peer doing in the *Illustrated Police News*? A railway guard becoming an Earl might be news, but to qualify for the *Illustrated Police News*, he would have to attend the House of Lords dressed in his railwayman's uniform, shoot at his tenants poaching for rabbits, or leap headlong into the orchestra pit of an Edinburgh theatre, shouting "Hooray for Auld Scotland!" But although the life of the 12th Earl of Lauderdale had been unspectacular, his death would be a dramatic one. In early August 1884, Scotland was struck by some tremendous thunderstorms. Not heeding the usual advice that it is wise to stay indoors under such circumstances, the Earl of Lauderdale made his way across the Braidshaw Rigg on his estate, accompanied by some keepers. All of a sudden, there was a great flash of lightning, completely blinding the keepers. They could perceive that the Earl had been struck by lightning, and that his pony had been killed. The Earl was carried to a farmhouse nearby, where he recovered consciousness and said a few words. It was considered curious that the lightning strike had fused his watch and chain. A few hours later, the Earl became comatose and died.

"An Earl killed by Lightning!" was the headline in the *Illustrated Police News*. With a crude illustration of the luckless peer collapsing to the ground, the *IPN* reported that the former railway guard had been of somewhat eccentric habits, and that he had shrunk from going into society. Since the 12th Earl was childless, the title was inherited by a cousin, Major Frederick Henry Maitland, of Bombay. Since that time, the title has been inherited in a more direct line, with railway guards playing no part whatsoever; the Earldom of Lauderdale is still extant today.


LORD LAUDERDALE STRUCK BY LIGHTNING

ABOVE: The Earl of Lauderdale is struck by lightning, from *Illustrated Police News*, 23 August 1884.

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Why Fortean?

Fortean Times is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of scientific explanations, observing how scientists argued according to their own beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

From the viewpoint of mainstream science, its function is elegantly stated in a line from Enid Welsford's book on the mediæval fool: "The Fool does not lead a revolt against the Law; he lures us into a region of the spirit where... the writ does not run."

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox.

FT toes no party line.

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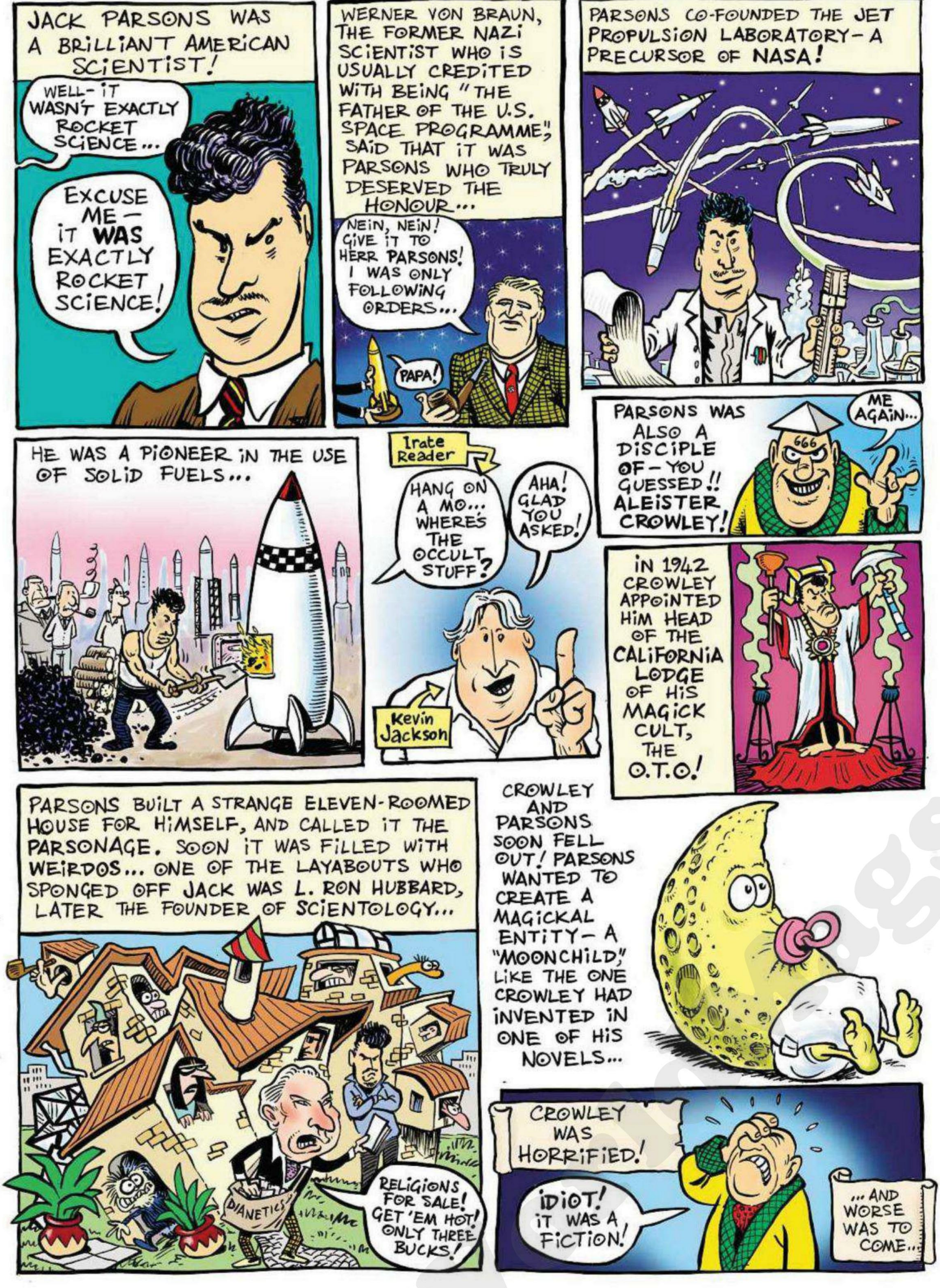
PHENOMENOMIX

JACK PARSONS pt 1

HUNT EMERSON & KEVIN JACKSON


JACK PARSONS WAS A BRILLIANT AMERICAN SCIENTIST!
WELL- IT WASN'T EXACTLY ROCKET SCIENCE...
EXCUSE ME - IT WAS EXACTLY ROCKET SCIENCE!
WERNER VON BRAUN, THE FORMER NAZI SCIENTIST WHO IS USUALLY CREDITED WITH BEING "THE FATHER OF THE U.S. SPACE PROGRAMME", SAID THAT IT WAS PARSONS WHO TRULY DESERVED THE HONOUR...
NEIN, NEIN! GIVE IT TO HERR PARSONS! I WAS ONLY FOLLOWING ORDERS...
PAPA!
PARSONS CO-FOUNDED THE JET PROPULSION LABORATORY - A PRECURSOR OF NASA!
HE WAS A PIONEER IN THE USE OF SOLID FUELS...
Irate Reader
HANG ON A MO... WHERE'S THE OCCULT STUFF?
AHA! GLAD YOU ASKED!
Kevin Jackson
PARSONS WAS ALSO A DISCIPLE OF - YOU GUESSED!! ALEISTER CROWLEY!
ME AGAIN...
666
IN 1942 CROWLEY APPOINTED HIM HEAD OF THE CALIFORNIA LODGE OF HIS MAGICK CULT, THE O.T.O.!
PARSONS BUILT A STRANGE ELEVEN-ROOMED HOUSE FOR HIMSELF, AND CALLED IT THE PARSONAGE. SOON IT WAS FILLED WITH WEIRDOS... ONE OF THE LAYABOUTS WHO SPONGED OFF JACK WAS L. RON HUBBARD, LATER THE FOUNDER OF SCIENTOLOGY...
DIANETICS
RELIGIONS FOR SALE! GET 'EM HOT! ONLY THREE BUCKS!
CROWLEY AND PARSONS SOON FELL OUT! PARSONS WANTED TO CREATE A MAGICKAL ENTITY - A "MOONCHILD", LIKE THE ONE CROWLEY HAD INVENTED IN ONE OF HIS NOVELS...
CROWLEY WAS HORRIFIED!
IDIOT! IT WAS A FICTION!
... AND WORSE WAS TO COME...

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EACH MONTH WE SEND *FORTEAN TIMES* FOUNDER BOB RICKARD DOWN INTO THE DARKEST, COBWEB-RIDDEN DEPTHS OF THE VAULTS OF FORTEAN TOWERS IN SEARCH OF STORIES FROM *FT*'S PAST.

JUNE 1982

Our estimable colleague Paul Sieveking has long had a fondness for appropriate (and inappropriate) names, especially when they cluster; here are some he culled from papers around this time. A duck farmer at Rothwell, Lincolnshire, employed two people called Crow, four Robbins, a Sparrow, a Gosling and a Dickie Bird. When PC Talbot Thrush was posted to a police station in Newport, Gwent, he joined two others called Pidgeon, a Partridge, a Nightingale and a Bush. When the Great Bustard Trust of Salisbury, Wilts, was given eight of the rare bird's eggs by the Hungarian government, the eggs were received at Heathrow by the airport's ground manager John Bustard. **FT40:26**; **57:32–33**

Writing about some fortean oddities of Australia, our old friend Tony Healy mentioned that some accounts of mainland sightings of the officially extinct Tasmanian Tiger – the dog-like marsupial Thylacine – contain an unusual detail to be found in some reports of lake monsters, anomalous big cats and manimals, namely a 'spooky' feeling and possibly a hint of extrasensory perception. He mentioned a sighting in Western Australia this month by a farming couple some of whose livestock had been killed and decapitated by, they claimed, Thylacines. They told a reporter "they know when the Thylacines are around when they get a prickly feeling [..] on the back of their necks." **FT49:44–45**

JUNE 1992

Early this month, Ugandan state radio gave considerable airtime to the prophecies of a talking goat – or rather to discussion of its prophecies. Apparently, the goat "spoke in a loud, terrifying voice" to villagers in Kyabagala, in Mukono district, and died a short time later. It announced that a great famine was coming and that the AIDS epidemic sweeping the country was divine punishment for disobeying the Ten Commandments. Back in 1978, we reported that rumours of a talking tortoise caused consternation by wandering the country prophesying trouble for Idi Amin, the country's unhinged cannibal dictator at the time. **FT27:39**; **66:9**

An editorial in a daily paper published by the government of Haiti expressed official outrage at what they called "industrial espionage" by the United States. The 'secrets' in question were the voodoo knowhow of the local shamans, *houngans*. US researchers and academics had been working closely with *houngans*, studying both their methods and the ingredients of their concoctions and treatments, many of which were local species "like the frou-frou fish and zombie cucumber" said to be used for controlling zombie slaves. Anger about their *houngans* passing on their recipes (hardly theft!) was exceeded by their accusation that US (pharmaceutical?) companies were not only failing to declare their research under the UN Bio-diversity Convention agreement, but also that the way was being prepared for commercial exploitation of their distinctive flora and fauna. **FT67:19**

Mid-month, several residents in the Welsh village of Waunfawr, Gwynedd, reported seeing a "monkey" on rooftops. One woman called it a "gorilla", saying it threw down a TV aerial before heading for the woods. Several days later, residents in Holyhead, Anglesey, reported spotting a "baboon" in leopard-skin shorts, on *their* roofs. Police later caught the animal. The suspicion was that it had escaped from Gandy's Circus, setting up in Holyhead at the time (though a spokesman denied this). Then there was a 'rhesus monkey' seen running free in Kidderminster, near Birmingham – not that far from Wales – about three weeks earlier. **65:19**

JUNE 2002

More monkey mayhem. On the morning of the 9th, Mustapha Riat reported a bizarre burglary of his home in Hackney, London. He had been woken up by "scratching and clawing" sounds to see "a black chimpanzee" leaning through the open window of his bedroom. It snatched his mobile phone off the bedside table beside the window and withdrew. Algerian-born Riat, 43, who taught French, said he had left the window open for his cats. He ran outside and across the road to Victoria Park, where he could find no one who had seen a chimp or a man with a chimp. Later, he rang his phone and it was answered by someone with what sounded like a West Indian accent. He remained convinced the chimp "must have been trained" to snatch phones. In the past, we have reported on a bear-like creature roaming nearby Hackney Marshes – now the site of London's new Olympic Park – but this is our first East End unfindable monkey sighting; if the thief was, indeed, simian. **FT163:8**

Rescue services in Denver, Colorado, were called to aid a woman who had become trapped in her house and unable to open her back door. They found that the back yard was filled with "thousands" of 3ft (90cm) diameter tumbleweeds, piled 16ft (4.8m) high. **FT163:9**

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